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**Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony**  
**in the Agri-Food System in Thailand (1990-2014)**

by

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## **Declaration and Inclusion of Material from a Prior Thesis**

This thesis is the candidate's own work. It has not been submitted for a degree at any other university. Earlier drafts of some chapters have been presented by the candidate as conference papers between 2012 and 2015, but the papers have not been published.

## **Abstract**

This thesis has two main objectives: (1) to provide a critical political economy study of local-global interlinkages and structural problems of the current agri-food system, using a case study of Thailand; and (2) to explore the possibilities that the current agri-food system can be transformed towards more socially and ecologically sustainable paths. With these two objectives in mind, the thesis asks the central research question: "How have hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces shaped the agri-food system in Thailand (1990 to 2014)?" The thesis uses a combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework, as well as English and Thai primary and secondary sources. Overall, 87 interviews from 7 provinces in the North, Central, South and Northeastern regions of Thailand are used in this thesis.

The thesis argues four main points: (1) that the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand has been shaped to aid capital accumulation by domestic and transnational hegemonic forces, and is sustained through hegemonic agri-food production-distribution, governance structures and ideational order; (2) that the Thai sustainable agriculture and land reform movements' counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices, and governance structures have managed to influence the agri-food system in Thailand and offer alternatives to certain extents; (3) that hegemonic forces have many measures to co-opt dissent, alternative and reformist forces into hegemonic structures; and (4) that counter-hegemony should be seen as an un-linear ongoing process over a long period of time, where predominantly counter-hegemonic forces may at times retain some hegemonic elements. The threat of co-optation suggests that counter-hegemonic forces need to

continually refine and develop clear ideas and practices in order to guard against co-optation.

The thesis makes six main original contributions to knowledge. First, it brings new empirical information from the Thai case study into existing literatures on the corporate agri-food system and agrarian political economy. Second, the thesis brings new empirical information from Thailand into existing literatures on alternative agri-food and agrarian movements. Third, the research extends neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical perspectives in the study of the agri-food system. Fourth, the dissertation provides new perspectives as well as recent data on Thai agrarian development and social movements. Fifth, the work provides new perspectives as well as recent data on practices and discourses of Thai localism. Sixth and finally, the thesis provides a new perspective on polarised politics in Thailand.

Empirical exploration of the agri-food system in Thailand supports the thesis' argument that transformative change in the agri-food system can appropriately be seen as an un-linear process over a long period of time, which challenges agri-food studies from the Marxist tradition which tend to focus on "crisis and change". Through the combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical approach, the thesis suggests the importance of counter-hegemonic struggles at ideational and material levels, and that social movements do not necessarily have to resemble stereotypical images of politicised, structured, and leftist national movements. Moreover, by providing new perspectives on Thai localism and polarised politics in Thailand, particularly how cross-class alliances can further or frustrate counter-hegemonic movements, this thesis points to the importance of analysing social movements in relation to established political authority.



## Abbreviations

AAN	Alternative Agriculture Network
ACIA	ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement
ACMECS	Aeyawadee-Chaopraya-Mekong Economic Co-operation
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ALRO	Agricultural Land Reform Office
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BAAC	Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives
BioThai	Biodiversity & Community Rights Action Thailand
BOI	Board of Investment
CAE	Community of Agro-Ecology Foundation
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CLTD	community land title deed
CP	Charoen Pokapand Group
CPB	Crown Property Bureau
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
DAE	Department of Agricultural Extensions
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FLO	Fairtrade Labeling Organisation International
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GAP	Good Agricultural Practice
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GM	genetically modified
GSP	Generalised System of Preferences

HYV	High Yielding Varieties
IAASTD	International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development
ICARRD	International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPE	International Political Economy
ISAC	Institute for a Sustainable Agriculture Community
LDD	Land Development Department
LRM	land reform movement
MOAC	Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives
MST	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra [Landless Rural Workers Movement]
NACC	National Anti-Corruption Commission
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NESDB	National Economic and Social Development Board
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OAE	Office of Agricultural Economics
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAD	People's Alliance for Democracy
PDRC	People's Democratic Reform Committee
PFT	Peasants' Federation of Thailand
PRAI	Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment
RFD	Royal Forestry Department

SAM	sustainable agriculture movement
SAO	Sub-district Administrative Organisation
SATHAI	Sustainable Agriculture Thailand Foundation
TDRI	Thailand Development Research Institute
TRF	Thailand Research Fund
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
TRT	Thai Rak Thai Party
UDD	United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPOV	International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants
WTO	World Trade Organisation

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

This opening chapter provides an overview of the thesis. It starts by describing the substantive problems in Thai and global agriculture that prompted the research. Subsequent sections of the chapter lay out the thesis' central research question, contributions to knowledge, theory and methodology, main arguments, and chapter outline. In short, the introductory chapter summarises the analysis that is elaborated in detail in the rest of the thesis.

#### **Part 1: Impetus to research**

This thesis originated from the author's interests in rural poverty and income inequality in Thailand. Further research and analysis of structural problems of Thai agriculture and rural poverty have led the author to academic studies on the global agri-food system, which inspired the topic of this thesis. In this thesis, an "agri-food system" is defined as being comprised of the set of activities and relationships that interact to determine what and how much, by what method and for whom food is produced, processed, distributed and consumed.<sup>1</sup> The thesis uses an international political economy approach to understand the agri-food system in Thailand as part of a globalised agri-food system. Core to this system is an interplay between forces that try to sustain the status quo and forces that seek alternatives to the current agri-food system. The thesis contributes to existing literature that focuses on Thailand (specifically on Thai rural development, agriculture and food, politics, poverty and

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Fine, *The Political Economy of Diet, Health and Food Policy* (London: Routledge, 1998), quoted in Michel Pimbert et al., "Global Restructuring , Agri-Food Systems and Livelihoods". IIED Gatekeeper series no. 100, 2001, 4.

inequality), as well as existing literature on the mainstream global agri-food system. The mainstream agri-food system is sometimes referred to in this thesis as the corporate or neo-liberal capitalist agri-food system to emphasise that, under this system, the main organising principle is the market<sup>2</sup> and that it is inseparable from the capitalist system. The following paragraphs explain why a study of agriculture and food is relevant in the present-day context, and briefly suggest the importance of a critical international political economy approach.

In Thailand, it is difficult to escape news reports, discussions and first-hand observations of problems facing small-scale farmers, unresolved rural poverty, rural-urban migration and, in recent years, political discourses engineered to exploit material and ideological differences between rural/marginalised classes of society and middle/higher classes in urban areas. Even though the agricultural sector accounted for only 11.46 percent of Thailand's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2009,<sup>3</sup> around 44.4 percent of the total workforce was in the agricultural sector in 2010.<sup>4</sup> Hence, a large share of the population still depends on the agricultural sector (to varying extents) despite its small share in the country's GDP. The agricultural sector, however, is plagued with problems. Chapter 3 discusses problems of the agri-food system in Thailand in detail, but to cite a brief example here, statistics show

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<sup>2</sup> Philip McMichael, "A Food Regime Analysis of the 'World Food Crisis'," *Agriculture and Human Values* 26, no. 4 (July 31, 2009), 285.

<sup>3</sup> Office of Agricultural Economics (Thailand), *Basic information on the agricultural sector 2010* (Bangkok: Office of Agricultural Economics, 2010), 1-2. Industry and service accounted for around 45 percent of GDP each.

<sup>4</sup> Office of Agricultural Economics (Thailand), *Agricultural Economics Indicators 2010* (Bangkok: Office of Agricultural Economics, 2010), 4.

that in 2009 around 6 million farmers were in debt to a total extent of 1 billion baht, and 30 percent of these loans were non-performing.<sup>5</sup>

Globally, also, agriculture and food remain important to marginalised people. Around 2.6 billion out of 7 billion people on Earth, or around 37 percent, rely on agriculture for their livelihood,<sup>6</sup> while 842 million people were unable to meet their dietary energy requirements between 2011 and 2013.<sup>7</sup> Of these 842 million, 827 million lived in developing regions.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, at least 70 percent of the world's 1.4 billion poor people reside in rural areas.<sup>9</sup> These statistics suggest the marginalised world population's dependency on agriculture and rural economies, as well as their vulnerabilities to food insecurity. Addressing problems of the global agri-food system is likely to have significant positive impact on their lives. Therefore, this thesis' contributions to the study of the dynamics and structural problems of the agri-food system, through a case study of Thailand, are very much relevant in the present-day context.

In recent years, there have been renewed interests in agricultural investments, as well as growing concerns over food security, following the hikes in world food prices of 2007 and 2008. Both in Thailand and globally, mainstream discourses often use concerns over food security to call for increased investments in the agricultural sector to improve economic efficiency and productivity, such as to reduce labour in

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Dr. Sansit Piriyaarangsarn, at the time head of the Farmers' Reconstruction and Development Fund, in "The Economics Team's Editorial," *Thairath Newspaper*, June 15, 2009. (in Thai)

<sup>6</sup> H.R. Herren et al., *UNEP Green Economy Report: Agriculture* (Geneva: UNEP, 2001), 36. Statistics on world population are based on UN estimate in October 2011.

<sup>7</sup> FAO, IFAD, and WFP, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2013. The Multiple Dimensions of Food Security* (Rome, 2013), 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Poor people are classified as those who live on less than US\$1.25 a day. IFAD, *Rural Poverty Report 2011. New Realities, New Challenges: New Opportunities for Tomorrow's Generation* (Rome, 2011), 16.

the agricultural sector through large-scale mechanised farming and with the help of biotechnology.<sup>10</sup> Global population growth and rising income levels in developing countries are also often cited in mainstream sources as main causes for global food security concerns.<sup>11</sup> Portraying food security as mainly a supply-demand issue, however, is only part of the story as statistics have shown that over the last two decades, food supplies have grown faster than the population in developing countries, resulting in rising food availability per person.<sup>12</sup> Food supply availability, however, does not necessarily translate into better food access and utilisation.<sup>13</sup> Mainstream focuses on high technologies of large corporations as solutions to global food security can also hide structural social, political, economic and ecological problems associated with the current agri-food system, which will be made salient through this thesis' critical international political economy approach.

In Thailand and in many other countries around the world, there are concerns over ecological unsustainability, social injustice and political-economic inequality associated with the current mainstream corporate agri-food system. For example, there are concerns over climate change and its effects on food security, negative environmental and health consequences of industrial agricultural production and trade, as well as monopoly control over agricultural inputs and trade channels. Many are also wary of financial speculations on agri-food commodities by non-commodity traders, the growth of agro-fuels production and its negative impact on food security,

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<sup>10</sup> For example, see Global Harvest Initiative, *Accelerating Productivity Growth: The 21st Century Global Agriculture Challenge. A White Paper on Agricultural Policy*, 2009, iii and Calestous Juma, "Feeding Africa: Why Biotechnology Sceptics Are Wrong to Dismiss GM," *The Guardian*, May 27, 2014..

<sup>11</sup> For example: FAO, *How to Feed the World in 2050* (Rome, 2009), 1; Global Harvest Initiative (2009), i-ii; Monsanto, "Why Does Agriculture Need to Be Improved? Growing Populations, Growing Challenges," <<http://www.monsanto.com/improvingagriculture/pages/growing-populations-growing-challenges.aspx>>, retrieved 30 June 2015.

<sup>12</sup> FAO, IFAD and WFP (2013), 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

as well as the influence of large transnational agri-businesses and global governance bodies on agri-food policies of countries around the world. Mainstream analytical frameworks, often based on neo-classical economics, usually do not take into account these concerns and lack adequate conceptual tools to discuss and analyse structural problems of the agri-food system. This is why the thesis adopts a critical international political economy theoretical approach, which allows discussions on important issues such as power relations and structural inequalities in the agri-food system, that are necessary to help analyse social, political-economic, and ecological ills of the current agri-food system.

## **Part 2: Central research question**

This thesis has two main objectives: 1) to provide a critical political-economic study of the local-global interlinkages and structural problems of the current agri-food system, using a case study of Thailand; and 2) to explore the possibilities that the current agri-food system can be transformed towards more socially and ecologically sustainable paths.

With these two objectives in mind, the thesis asks the central research question: *"How have hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces shaped the agri-food system in Thailand (1990 to 2014)?"* The Gramscian terms "hegemonic" and "counter-hegemonic" are explained later in this chapter's summary of the theoretical framework.

To answer the central research question, the thesis asks the following sub-questions:



- What are the problems of the current corporate agri-food system? (to be discussed in chapters 2 and 3)
- What hegemonic forces operate in the agri-food system in Thailand? (to be discussed in chapter 3)
- What counter-hegemonic forces try to resist and offer alternatives to the current agri-food system? (to be discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6)
- How do counter-hegemonic forces analyse problems of the agri-food system; and how do their analyses shape their strategies and activities? (to be discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6)
- What and how have factors specific to the Thai context shaped the mainstream agri-food system and alternative agri-food movements? (to be discussed in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6)
- How do hegemonic forces respond to critiques of the current agri-food system? (to be discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6)

One could argue that interconnections between production and consumption in the agri-food system make them inseparable. However, the thesis' starting point and focus are on the production rather than consumption side of the agri-food system. This is due to the limited length of the thesis and because problems associated with industrial agricultural production methods, as well as unequal distribution of land, are main issues which give rise to the sustainable agriculture and land reform movements in Thailand, which will be discussed as counter-hegemonic forces in chapters 4 to 6.

### **Part 3: Original contributions to knowledge**

The thesis makes six main empirical and conceptual original contributions to knowledge. First, it brings new empirical information from the Thai case study into existing literature on the corporate agri-food system and agrarian political economy. Second, the thesis brings new empirical information from Thailand into existing literature on alternative agri-food and agrarian movements. Third, the thesis extends neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical perspectives in the study of the agri-food system. Fourth, the thesis provides new perspectives as well as recent data on Thai agrarian development and social movements. Fifth, the thesis provides new perspectives as well as recent data on practices and discourses of Thai localism. Sixth, the thesis provides new perspectives on polarised politics in Thailand. These original contributions to knowledge are elaborated in the following paragraphs.

#### ***3.1) Brings new empirical information on the mainstream agri-food system***

A survey of literature on the agri-food system and agrarian political economy finds no study which gives a recent and comprehensive political-economic analysis of the agri-food system in Thailand. Academic literature surveyed, such as from the *Journal of Agrarian Change* and *Journal of Peasant Studies*, touch on topics such as land grabs, problems of industrial agriculture, agro-fuels, power of transnational agri-businesses, financialisation and speculations in the agri-food system. They often discuss examples of developing countries using case studies from Africa and Latin America, or with specific focuses on Asian countries other than Thailand.<sup>14</sup> Chapter

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<sup>14</sup> Although not an exhaustive list, some of the studies surveyed include: Miguel Altieri and Victor Manuel Toledo, "The Agroecological Revolution in Latin America: Rescuing Nature, Ensuring Food Sovereignty and Empowering Peasants," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 3 (July 2011): 587–612; Miguel Teubal, "Peasant Struggles for Land and Agrarian Reform in Latin America," in *Peasants and Globalization: Political Economy, Rural Transformation and the Agrarian Question*, ed. A. Haroon

2 will use some of these studies to elaborate on problems of the current agri-food system. In some studies, examples from Thailand are briefly discussed, while in some other studies the focus might be on Thailand, but then only some aspects of the agri-food system are discussed, such as boom crops and contract farming.<sup>15</sup>

A comprehensive international political economy study of the agri-food system in Thailand, as presented in this thesis, can contribute more extensively to existing literature. Thailand is an interesting case study for many reasons, in addition to the suggestion that middle-income countries have emerged in recent years as new players which influence agri-food governance.<sup>16</sup> Not only is Thailand a major exporter of agri-food products, with controversial government policies such as the paddy pledging scheme (to be discussed in chapter 4). The country is also headquarters of Charoen Pokphand (CP), a large and politically influential Asian transnational agri-business. Empirical discussions of land grabs in Thailand in this thesis also adds to emerging studies on land grabs in Southeast Asia,<sup>17</sup> and can also be used to challenge stereotypical images of land grabs as large-scale acquisitions of land by foreign capital, such as by suggesting how foreign land grabs can occur

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Akram-Lodhi and Cristobal Kay (New York: Routledge, 2009); Jens Lerche, Alpa Shah, and Barbara Harriss-White, "Introduction: Agrarian Questions and Left Politics in India," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 13, no. 3 (July 16, 2013): 337–350; Bridget O’Laughlin et al., "Introduction: Agrarian Change, Rural Poverty and Land Reform in South Africa since 1994," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 13, no. 1 (January 12, 2013): 1–15.

<sup>15</sup> For example: Jasper Goss, David Burch, and Roy E. Rickson, "Agri-Food Restructuring and Third World Transnationals: Thailand, the CP Group and the Global Shrimp Industry," *World Development* 28, no. 3 (2000): 513–530; Isabelle Delforge, *Contract Farming in Thailand: A View from the Farm. A Report for Focus on the Global South* (Bangkok: Focus on the Global South, 2007); Ben Belton and David Little, "The Development of Aquaculture in Central Thailand: Domestic Demand versus Export-Led Production," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, no. 1 (December 12, 2007): 123–143; Jefferson Fox and Jean-Christophe Castella, "Expansion of Rubber (*Hevea Brasiliensis*) in Mainland Southeast Asia: What Are the Prospects for Smallholders?," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 40, no. 1 (January 2013): 155–170.

<sup>16</sup> Saturnino M. Borras, Jennifer C. Franco, and Chunyu Wang, "The Challenge of Global Governance of Land Grabbing : Changing International Agricultural Context and Competing Political Views and Strategies," *Globalizations* 10, no. 1 (2013), 163.

<sup>17</sup> At the time of thesis submission, the author came across many conference papers on land grabs in Southeast Asia, which are presented at the "Land Grabbing: Perspectives from East and Southeast Asia" conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand, June 2015. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in comparative studies or to suggest a regional perspective on land grabs in Southeast Asia.

through nominees. Moreover, there are historical, social, cultural and political-economic conditions in Thailand which give rise to a unique form of the hegemonic mainstream agri-food system. These issues will be explored in greater detail in chapter 3.

### ***3.2) Brings new empirical information on alternative agri-food movements***

Empirical discussions of alternative agri-food and agrarian movements from Thailand contribute to existing literature, as a lot of such studies are based on movements in Latin America,<sup>18</sup> while only a few studies are based on movements in Southeast Asia.<sup>19</sup> The thesis' focus on unique historical, social and political-economic conditions which shape agri-food and agrarian movements in Thailand also enriches existing literature. Studies on food sovereignty movements, for example, have been criticised for focusing too much on the homogeneity of movements in different countries, without paying much attention to differences within and between countries.<sup>20</sup> There are studies which discuss how transnational agrarian social movements generally agree on certain types of common political strategies and forms of action.<sup>21</sup> However, it is also important academically and politically to understand that there are potential and actual differences within and between social movements. When some transnational agrarian social movements look to build alliances in other countries, and see no rural associations that are

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<sup>18</sup> For example: James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer, *Social Movements in Latin America: Neoliberalism and Popular Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Abdurazack Karriem, "The Rise and Transformation of the Brazilian Landless Movement into a Counter-Hegemonic Political Actor: A Gramscian Analysis," *Geoforum* 40, no. 3 (May 2009): 316–325.

<sup>19</sup> Examples: Kevin Malseed, "Where There Is No Movement: Local Resistance and the Potential for Solidarity," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, no. 2–3 (2008): 489–514; Nancy Lee Peluso, Suraya Afiff, and Noer Fauzi Rachman, "Claiming the Grounds for Reform: Agrarian and Environmental Movements in Indonesia," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, no. 2–3 (2008): 377–407.

<sup>20</sup> Saturnino M. Borras and Marc Edelman, "Transnational Agrarian Movements Confronting Globalization," *Journal of Agrarian Change* (2008), 169–204.

<sup>21</sup> Such studies include, for example, Annette Desmarais, *La Vía Campesina: Globalization and the Power of Peasants*. (London: Pluto, 2007), quoted in Borras and Edelman (2008), 187.

similar to them ideologically and politically, they tend to conclude that there are no social movements in these societies. For example, Central Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, China and Southeast Asia are often characterised as having no clear political strategies or having an absence of movements.<sup>22</sup> Such assumptions are problematic, as in many countries peasants do engage in "everyday forms of resistance" that maybe unorganised, unstructured or covert to defend or advance their interests.<sup>23</sup>

As chapter 5 will discuss in greater detail, members of the sustainable agriculture movement (SAM) in Thailand are generally inspired by transnational ideas and practice such as food sovereignty, organic and community support agriculture. However, some of SAM members' ideas and discourses, such as their appeals to traditional wisdom and local sufficiency, might cause them to be perceived as conservative forces. Chapter 5 will also discuss some critiques of Thai localism and argue that, while Thai localism might not be unproblematic, it should nevertheless be considered as having counter-hegemonic potential. Such an argument resonates with some studies on social movements in other Asian countries, which seek to enrich existing literature's perception of what constitutes counter-hegemonic agri-food movements. For example, Le Mons Walker (2008) argues that one should not assume that local struggles by peasants and the rural dispossessed in China in the last 20 years will not assume a broader social or political form, and that the peasants have actually forged collective identities that can provide a basis for

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<sup>22</sup> Borras and Edelman (2008), 187; Saturnino M. Borras, Marc Edelman, and Cristóbal Kay, "Transnational Agrarian Movements: Origins and Politics, Campaigns and Impact," in *Transnational Agrarian Movements Confronting Globalization*, ed. Saturnino M. Borras, Marc Edelman, and Cristóbal Kay (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> For example: James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Benedict Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), quoted in Borras and Edelman (2008), 187.

conceptualising alternatives to neo-liberal capitalism.<sup>24</sup> Another example is Malseed (2008) which argues that it is more useful to think of social movements as having a multitude of possible structural expressions, ranging from well-organised network structures to leaderless and nebulous movements such as Karen-style village resistance in Burma.<sup>25</sup> Some scholars have also raised questions regarding representation and accountability of transnational social movements, suggesting that there is little analysis on the linkages between the local, national and international levels of contemporary agrarian movements.<sup>26</sup> As a contribution to this discussion, chapter 5 will discuss the SAM's transnational collaborations, while chapter 6 will discuss the land reform movement (LRM) and its connection with La Vía Campesina - the largest transnational peasants movement.

### ***3.3) Extends neo-Marxist and Gramscian theories on the agri-food system***

Key scholars in the study of the global corporate agri-food system, such as Philip McMichael, Farshad Araghi, and Jason W. Moore, have used neo-Marxist perspectives and concepts, such as David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession, to explain dynamics of the current agri-food system.<sup>27</sup> Chapter 2 part 3 utilises their work to construct a framework to explain problems of the current corporate agri-food system. An additional contribution of this thesis is to combine and to elaborate more extensively on how Gramscian theoretical perspectives can add to existing neo-Marxist understandings of the corporate agri-food system, as

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<sup>24</sup> Kathy Le Mons Walker, "From Covert to Overt: Everyday Peasant Politics in China and the Implications for Transnational Agrarian Movements," in *Transnational Agrarian Movements Confronting Globalization* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 310 and 315.

<sup>25</sup> Malseed (2008), 338.

<sup>26</sup> Borras, Edelman and Kay (2008), 11.

<sup>27</sup> For example: McMichael, "A Food Regime Analysis," (2009); Farshad Araghi, "Food Regimes and the Production of Value: Some Methodological Issues," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 30, no. 2 (2003): 41–70; Jason W. Moore, "Transcending the Metabolic Rift: A Theory of Crises in the Capitalist World- Ecology," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 28, no. 1 (2011): 1–46.

well as possibilities of change. Neo-Marxist theoretical perspectives help the thesis to explain structural forces that sustain the corporate agri-food system, but they do not allow much room to discuss the creation of ideas, values and discourses that help to sustain the status quo, or to aid alternative agri-food movements. It is true that certain authors have discussed hegemonic ideas and co-optations in the corporate agri-food system. For instance, McMichael suggests that in the current corporate agri-food system, there are hegemonic principles and assumptions which appear as implicit natural rules, such as beliefs in efficiency over ecology.<sup>28</sup> There are also quite a few studies of value creation in alternative food networks.<sup>29</sup> However, these studies do not discuss interlinkages of ideas, production-distribution practices, and governance structures in the agri-food system to the same extent as this thesis.

With combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian perspectives, the thesis is better able to articulate the symbiosis of ideas and practices in the agri-food system, using concepts such as commodification, accumulation by dispossession, appropriation of surplus, hegemony, counter-hegemony and co-optation of oppositions. In other words, these Gramscian concepts help the thesis to explain how ideas continuously shape practices and material structures in the agri-food system in Thailand, and vice versa. In addition, a combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework can be used to describe how different forces shape the agri-food system in Thailand over time, in contrast to neo-Marxist frameworks, which often focus on crisis and change. A summary of the theoretical framework is provided in part 4 of this chapter.

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<sup>28</sup> McMichael, "A Food Regime Analysis," (2009), 292.

<sup>29</sup> For example: David Goodman and E. Melanie DuPuis, "Knowing Food and Growing Food: Beyond the Production-Consumption Debate in the Sociology of Agriculture," *Sociologia Ruralis* 42, no. 1 (January 2002): 5–22; Julie Guthman, "Raising Organic: An Agro-Ecological Assessment of Grower Practices in California" (2000): 257–266; Laura T. Raynolds, "Consumer/Producer Links in Fair Trade Coffee Networks," *Sociologia Ruralis* 42, no. 4 (October 2002).

### ***3.4) New perspectives and data on Thai agrarian development and movements***

There are some books on Thailand published in the 1990s which address the agricultural/rural sector as part of Thailand's historical economic and political development as a whole, and take into account some new forms of social movements which were concerned with agriculture and natural resources.<sup>30</sup> There are also studies in the 1970s and 1980s which have used political economy frameworks to understand problems in the agri-food system, agrarian development and social movements of those periods.<sup>31</sup> However, these studies are now quite old, and there is a need for more up-to-date study that takes into account recent developments in the agri-food sector.

Aside from bringing in more up-to-date information, this thesis also provides a new way of looking at problems and contradictions in the agri-food system in Thailand. It further sheds new light on alternative agri-food movements in Thailand. A review of literature in recent years suggests that studies on the Thai agricultural sector often adopt business and economic approaches. Moreover, a lot of the studies are quite Thai-centric in the sense that they do not study the problems of the Thai agri-food system as part of a wider global agri-food system or global capitalist system. When they do, their analyses are based on mainstream economic frameworks which are mostly concerned with price mechanisms, export potentials,

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<sup>30</sup> For example: Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand: Economy and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Walden Bello, Shea Cunningham, and Li Kheng Pho, *A Siamese Tragedy: Development and Disintegration in Modern Thailand* (New York: Zed Books, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> For example: Krirkiat Phipatseritham, *The Social, Economic and Political Change and the Concentration of Economic Power by Private Enterprise*. (Bangkok: Economics Department, Thammasart University, 1979); Witayakorn Chiengkul, *The Effects of Capitalist Penetration on the Transformation of the Agrarian Structure in the Central Region of Thailand (1960-1980)* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1983); Andrew Turton, *Production, Power and Participation in Rural Thailand: Experiences of Poor Farmers' Groups* (Geneva, 1987); Kevin Hewison, *Power and Politics in Thailand: Essays in Political Economy* (Manila: Journal of Contemporary Asia Publishers, 1989).



or are intent on offering specific policy evaluations, such as studies by the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI).<sup>32</sup> Other studies include, for example, Phetprasert (2006), which attempts to evaluate the Thai government's rice storage loans, with a brief mention of how the international rice market influences domestic prices of rice, and Thaotawil (2003), which evaluates government policies on farmers' debt moratorium.<sup>33</sup>

Most studies surveyed in this research tend to focus on documenting very specialised problems in the agri-food system, but do not analyse root political-economic causes of the problems, nor talk about recent attempts at transforming the agri-food system towards a more sustainable system. There are some good empirical studies, such as Pintoptang et al. (2003), which documents case studies of poverty problems facing small-scale farmers.<sup>34</sup> However, these studies do not provide comprehensive theoretical explanation of root political-economic causes of rural poverty; nor do they address social movements which try to reform the agri-food system. There are also a few studies on contract farming in Thailand.<sup>35</sup> Publications by NGOs are often quite critical of the mainstream agri-food system, and tend to provide up-to-date information of recent problems of the agri-food system in

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<sup>32</sup> Nipon Poapongsakorn, *Study of the Supply Chain Management and Logistics of Agricultural Products* (Bangkok: Thailand Development Research Institute, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> Narong Phetprasert, "Rice Politics Under State-Capital Monopoly," in *Journal of Political Economy (for the Community)* (Bangkok: Edison Press, 2006) (in Thai); Pruek Thaotawil, "Government Policies and Farmers' Debts: The Failure of Small-Scale Farmers' Debt Moratorium," in *A Study of the Possibility of Developing a Welfare System for the Poor and Disadvantaged in Thailand*. (Bangkok: Thailand Research Foundation, 2003). (in Thai)

<sup>34</sup> Prapart Pintoptang, Supha Yaimuang, and Banchorn Kaewsong, *The Possibility of Developing the Welfare System for the Poor and the Disadvantaged: The Case of Farmers* (Bangkok: Political Economy Study Center, Economics Faculty, Chulalongkorn University, 2003). (in Thai)

<sup>35</sup> For example: Delforge, "Contract farming in Thailand," (2007); D. Glover and L.T. Ghee, *Contract Farming in Southeast Asia: Three Country Studies*, ed. D. Glover and L.T. Ghee (Kuala Lumpur: Institute Pengajian Tinggi/Institute for Advanced Studies, 2008); Pruek Limnirandkul, Bootsara, Yipmantasiri, Cho-paka Muangsuk, and Pratanthip Kramol, "Contract Farming and the Opportunity of Development of Small Scale Farmers" (Chiang Mai, 2006).

Thailand.<sup>36</sup> However, despite their merits, these studies do not provide a comprehensive political economy theoretical framework to understand the problems of the agri-food system.

Adopting a neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework to study the agri-food system in Thailand does not only provide a new way of understanding the topic, but it also has progressive political implications. Instead of identifying problems as isolated issues, a neo-Marxist and Gramscian approach enables us to see problems of the agri-food system as having roots in interrelated ideational and material structures, and that extensive changes are needed across local, national, regional and global scales. In addition, by regarding the agri-food system in Thailand as part of the global agri-food system, it should become more salient that there are factors specific to Thailand as well as factors resulting from a globally interlinked agri-food system, that have shaped the current agri-food system in Thailand. This supplements some Thai-centric literature which tends to focus on domestic factors.

### ***3.5) Provides new perspectives and empirical data on Thai localism***

An activist who has written extensively on problems of the agri-food system in Thailand summarises quite well that there are two main views in existing studies regarding rural development in Thailand. The first group of people, usually identified as Thai localists, see community culture and rural sufficiency as desirable models to be implemented, while the other group views rural communities and small-scale farmers as something to be overcome, or as transitional situations toward modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation. Both views may have limitations.

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<sup>36</sup> For example, see publications by Biothai Foundation (<http://www.biothai.net/>) and Green Net Cooperative (<http://www.greennet.or.th/>).

On the one hand, localists may underestimate the extent that the modern economy has transformed the rural sector. On the other hand, people who hold modernisation views may not give enough importance to the agricultural sector and its potential, and usually neglect to analyse the power of capital in the current agri-food system.<sup>37</sup>

Another contribution that this thesis makes is to provide new perspectives on the seemingly polarised debate between the "localist" camp and the "modernist" camp. Thai localism will be discussed in more detail in chapters 4 and 5. Briefly, a review of literature suggests that there are scholars who are very critical of Thai localist ideas and practices, seeing them as conservative forces.<sup>38</sup> Others, however, see Thai localism more positively,<sup>39</sup> and as an alternative development path to that of Western modernisation.<sup>40</sup> This thesis suggests that Thai localism can involve counter-hegemonic attempts to create alternative development ideas and practices, although some variants of Thai localism might be problematic. Moreover, Thai localist ideas are still being improved, and they should not be ruled out as fundamentally elitist and conservative ideologies. As chapters 5 and 6 will discuss, both the sustainable agriculture and land reform movements' counter-hegemonic ideas and practices are partially inspired by localist ideas.

### ***3.6) Provides new perspectives on polarised politics in Thailand***

Discussions on polarised political conflicts in Thailand, whether in Thailand (in newspapers, public forums, etc.) or in academic literature, usually focus on a few

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<sup>37</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon, "The Role of Agri-Businesses and the Changes in Rural Thailand and Thai Society," updated 25 November 2011, <<http://www.biothai.net/node/10889>>, 3. (in Thai)

<sup>38</sup> For example: Kevin Hewison, "Localism in Thailand: A Study of Globalisation and Its Discontents," CSGR Working Paper No. 39/99, (September 1999), 22; Duncan McCargo, "Populism and Reformism in Contemporary Thailand," *South East Asia Research* 9, no. 1 (2001): 89–107.

<sup>39</sup> For example: Phongpaichit (2005), 138; Chatthip Nartsupha, *Modernisation and the "Community" School of Thought* (Bangkok: Sangsan Publishing, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Chatthip Nartsupha, *Modernisation and the "Community" School of Thought* (Bangkok: Sangsan Publishing, 2010), 166-167 and 174, 177. (in Thai)

issues, such as the legitimacy of "street protests" politics versus "electoral and parliamentary" politics, the extent of power of different groups of political elites in Thailand (particularly the military and the monarchy), corruption, nationalism, etc.<sup>41</sup> Although polarised politics is not the focus of this thesis, effects of polarised politics in Thailand on the agri-food system and social movements will be discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Such issues have been neglected in the study of political conflicts in Thailand in recent years.

This thesis contributes to understandings of polarised politics in Thailand in recent years, by pointing out damaging and dividing effects that the polarised political situation and discourses have on civil society and alternative agri-food movements in Thailand. For example, existing political polarisation reduces discussions of agrarian development to having only "two opposing sides" and distracts people from social and ecological destruction threats posed by the capitalist system and political-economic elites (on both sides of the conflicts), which arguably has negative effects on the people's movements and the well-being of the population. The thesis also suggests that class-based analysis of polarised politics in Thailand is problematic. Chapters 4 to 6 discuss these issues in greater detail.

#### **Part 4: Theory and methodology**

This thesis adopts a critical international political economy (IPE) approach with a combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework. It also uses a critical inductive approach, where starting points of theoretical generalisations are based on

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<sup>41</sup> This is not an exhaustive list, but see, for example: Kevin Hewison, "A Book, the King and the 2006 Coup," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 38, no. 1 (2008); Kasian Tejapira, "Toppling Thaksin," *New Left Review* 39 (2006); Pasuk Phongpaichit, "Thai Politics beyond the 2006 Coup" no. July (2007): 1–4; Alex M. Mutebi, "Explaining the Failure of Thailand's Anti-Corruption Regime," *Development and Change* 39, no. 1 (January 2008): 147–171.

empirical observations, rather than treating theories and assumptions as facts or unambiguous "truth".<sup>42</sup> The decision to adopt a critical global/IPE approach was based on preliminary empirical observations that led the author to seek out the most convincing explanatory theoretical framework. Prior to the start of the PhD research project, the author had observed that mainstream neo-classical economic analyses might be inadequate in addressing structural problems of the agri-food system, which have political implications. Such observations have led the author to agree with foundational principles of critical IPE in the Coxian tradition, particularly the rejection of the belief that there is a value-free theory.<sup>43</sup> The term "critical" in IPE in this context refers to a kind of analysis that sees existing social orders and their structural inequalities as products of history, and that the role of critical analysis is both to interpret and to help change existing social orders. In other words, to be critical means to have "progressive commitment towards emancipation and the belief that the present social system can be transformed in order to address its injustices."<sup>44</sup> Preliminary empirical observations of local, national and global linkages in the agri-food system in Thailand also suggest the appropriateness of the critical IPE analytical framework.

The combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework enables the thesis to analyse structural problems of the agri-food system in Thailand in ways that reflect the complexity of contemporary situations, taking into account the interconnections of ideational and material structures. Moreover, the framework

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<sup>42</sup> Angus Cameron and Ronen Palan, "Empiricism and Objectivity: Reflexive Theory Construct in a Complex World," in *Routledge Handbook of International Political Economy: International Political Economy as a Global Conversation*, ed. Mark Blyth (London: Routledge, 2007), 123–125.

<sup>43</sup> Jason P. Abbott and Owen Worth, "Introduction: The 'Many Worlds' of Critical International Political Economy," in *Critical Perspectives on International Political Economy*, ed. Jason P. Abbott and Owen Worth (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Owen Worth, "Reclaiming Critical IPE from the 'British' School," in *Critical International Political Economy Dialogue, Debate and Dissensus*, ed. Stuart Shields, Ian Bruff, and Huw Macartney (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 118.

helps the thesis to explore how the agri-food system might be directed in more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable directions through ideational and practical initiatives, as well as cross-class alliances, which should constantly try to improve and reinvent themselves to guard against co-optation.

The theoretical framework of this thesis was first drafted after significant literature reviews and was subjected to many further revisions during the course of the research, based on reflections and engagement with additional empirical data. The most significant revision of the theoretical framework occurred in respect of counter-hegemonic prospects. Initially, inspired by the 2007/2008 food crisis narratives, the prospects of structural counter-hegemonic changes were portrayed in the theoretical framework as arising from "crisis" (or crises) brought about by structural contradictions of the agri-food system. The revised theoretical framework now conceptualises change or transformation in the agri-food system as an un-linear continuous process over a long period of time, shaped by hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces in the agri-food system. The following section briefly summarises the neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework adopted in this thesis.

#### ***4.1) Summary of the neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework***

As chapter 2 will elaborate, the mainstream neo-classical/neo-liberal economics approach is problematic because, with its unsustainable reductionist theoretical assumptions and models, it inadequately explains problems of the agri-food system. It neglects to discuss structural social-ecological problems and power relations within the agri-food and economic system, which in effect conceals structural inequalities, ecological unsustainability, and tensions within the current agri-food system. Chapter 2 will also discuss how poststructuralist and feminist/gendered

perspectives also contributed some insights to the theoretical framework of the thesis. Specifically, poststructuralist studies point to the importance of ideas, values, knowledge and the power of consumers in the creation of alternative agri-food systems. The feminist/gendered perspectives enrich the neo-Marxist framework by pointing out the importance of non-commodified work, and that both capitalism and patriarchy can be seen as sources of structural oppression.

There are two main parts to the neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework of the thesis. In the neo-Marxist part, the thesis draws on the work of scholars such as Philip McMichael, Farshad Araghi, David Harvey, and Jason W. Moore to conceptualise agriculture and food as integral parts of global capital accumulation, where structural problems of the current agri-food system are inseparable from the capitalist system. Chapter 2 will discuss in greater detail the processes in which capitalism's exploitation of both labour and nature, as well as surplus appropriation through market exchanges, are linked to contemporary agri-food issues such as commodification of natural resources, negative environmental effects of industrial agriculture, land grabs, speculations, and monopoly power in the agri-food system. In other words, the neo-Marxist part of the theoretical framework provides the basis for this thesis' conceptualisation of the mainstream "hegemonic" agri-food system. As chapters 4 to 6 will discuss, environmental and social problems of the hegemonic capitalist agri-food system spark "counter-hegemonic" ideas and practical alternatives that try to challenge, reform and/or transform the mainstream agri-food system towards more socio-ecological sustainable paths.

The second part of the theoretical framework uses Gramscian concepts of "hegemony" and "counter-hegemony" to classify main types of forces which shape

the agri-food system. Practices and ideas that sustain the mainstream capitalist agri-food system are seen as part of hegemony, whereas forces which try to change and transform such hegemonic ideas and practices are portrayed as counter-hegemonic forces. The thesis also uses a Gramscian concept of "co-optation of oppositions" to understand hegemonic forces' attempts to integrate or subsume dissent so that it does not become a major threat to the status quo. As the following chapters will discuss, in reality distinctions between hegemony, counter-hegemony, and co-optation of oppositions are not always clear-cut. Moreover, although the global dimension is an important focus, this thesis does not neglect the importance of nation-specific counter-hegemonic strategies to influence the agri-food system.

Overall, the neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework of the thesis explains the dynamics of the agri-food system in Thailand, as something which is continually being shaped and re-shaped by hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces. The Gramscian concept of counter-hegemony is particularly useful in helping the thesis to address both ideational and material dimensions of counter-hegemony, and to emphasise that struggles to change the status quo are likely to be an un-linear process over a long period of time.

#### ***4.2) Methodology and data collection***

This thesis uses different types of primary and secondary sources in Thai and English languages. The following paragraphs discuss different types of secondary sources that are used in the thesis, methods of obtaining them, as well as primary sources that are used. Special attention is given to explanations of why and how semi-structured interviews were used, how case studies and interviewees were



chosen, important interview questions, how interviews were conducted and processed, as well as ethical considerations during the field research.

The thesis draws on a wide range of secondary sources in English and in Thai, which are related to the study of the agri-food system and alternative agri-food movements: for example, studies on agro-fuels and the food-energy nexus, land grabs, the Green Revolution and genetically modified seeds, agri-businesses, agro-ecology, food sovereignty, food security, fair trade, organic products, local green markets, and so on. Literature on Thailand includes, for example, works on agrarian development, Thai localism, Thai civil society, rural poverty and inequality, agriculture and food chains, contract farming, and polarised politics in Thailand. Literature surveyed for the thesis comes from various disciplines across the social sciences, including those which adopt politics, sociology and business approaches, as well as some scientific studies, such as studies on negative effects of agricultural pesticides.

Secondary sources were obtained through different channels. Academic books, journal articles, dissertations, reports based on academic conferences, as well as publications by NGO researchers were obtained from universities in the UK and in Thailand, in hard copies and as online downloads. In addition, through attending academic conferences in the UK, other parts of Europe, Canada, Japan, and Thailand, the author was exposed to varieties of research materials and key scholars. In Thailand, the author obtained secondary sources from libraries at Thammasat University and at Kasetsart University. Some dissertations and studies were downloaded online from the Chiang Mai University library website, as well as from Thammasat and Kasetsart University libraries. Publications by academics and NGOs

were obtained at book fairs and during visits to their offices, such as at the BioThai Foundation in Nonthaburi province. In addition, numerous research reports funded by the Thailand Research Fund (TRF) and publications by the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) were obtained online.

Primary documents used in the research include government publications and statistics made available online, such as by the Thai National Statistical Office and the Office of Agricultural Economics. Interviews and statements made public by people and organisations relevant to the study of the agri-food system in Thailand were also often obtained online through Thai newspapers' websites and their organisational websites.

Substantial primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews,<sup>45</sup> as well as materials from conferences and public forums, obtained in Thailand from October 2012 to February 2013. During the field research, 97 people from 7 provinces (in the North, Central, South and Northeastern regions of Thailand) were interviewed. However, the final draft of the thesis uses 87 of the interviews. Semi-structured interviews were mainly used to gather information on the sustainable agriculture movement (SAM) and the land reform movement (LRM), which are the two case studies of counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand to be discussed in chapters 4 to 6, because up-to-date information from secondary sources was scarce. Interviewees associated with the movements were farmers, NGO activists, academics, civil servants and local leaders. Among 87 interviews, 12 involved government officials and 5 involved academics (officials were in senior positions or from local administrative offices). In addition to the interviewees, 10

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<sup>45</sup> See the list of interviewees after the bibliography.

organic businesses and agri-businesses owners were interviewed through email exchanges. In the final draft, the thesis uses 7 of these email exchanges. The author tried to interview a larger number of government officials and representatives from agri-businesses, such as from Monsanto (Thailand), but it was not always possible to get interviews. To supplement the interviews, the thesis uses secondary sources to explore the state and the private sector's perspectives.

Semi-structured interviews as a method was preferred over quantitative surveys and structured interviews, because they allowed for collections of more open-minded, comprehensive, and multi-dimensional information,<sup>46</sup> which was necessary to understand the SAM and the LRM. On the one hand, qualitative semi-structured interviews allowed room for the author to understand the interviewees on their own terms and to adapt questions (or how each question was worded) accordingly, based on new information revealed during interviews. On the other hand, some prepared main questions and topics enabled the author to stay focused during the interviews. Predetermined structured questions and quantitative surveys might uncritically "frame" answers of interviewees according to particular theoretical framework and existing literature. A good example was how the author, under the influence of past neo-classical economics training, initially tended to focus on asking about economic returns and productivity of organic farming compared to mainstream industrial farming. Through qualitative interviews, the author came to understand the world-views of members of the SAM, who have other ways of understanding and explaining advantages of sustainable farming, as well as how

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<sup>46</sup> Many books discuss the benefits of qualitative methods and semi-structured interviews, such as Bruce L. Berg and Howard Lune, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (New Jersey: Pearson, 2012).

sustainable farming might help to transform the corporate agri-food system and Thai society.

The SAM and the LRM were selected as case studies of counter-hegemonic movements in the agri-food system in Thailand, because they can be seen as the most prominent movements/networks which have challenged and influenced some important ideas and practices of the current corporate agri-food system for decades. Interviews of members of the SAM and the LRM have provided information on their critiques of the hegemonic agri-food system, as well as their counter-hegemonic ideas, practices and limitations. Having two case studies provided more comprehensive insights of counter-hegemony in the agri-food system; while farmers in the SAM tend to have their own land or relatively easier access to land, members of the LRM tend to be landless or land-scarce farmers and marginalised population, so their priorities, goals and strategies are different.

The SAM and the LRM have members and supporters in many regions throughout Thailand, as well as internationally. In chapters 4 to 6, both secondary sources and primary sources will be used in cross-reference analyses of different groups in the SAM and the LRM, to give comprehensive overviews of the movements. The thesis could not cover major sites in every region due to financial and time constraints. However, interviews and site visits were carried out in important geographical locations and groups, as the following paragraphs elaborate.

For the study of the SAM, interviews and site visits were focused in four provinces in three regions of Thailand: Bangkok (the capital city) and metropolitan area (Central), Chiang Mai (North), as well as Surin and Yasothon (Northeast). Such an arrangement allowed for key figures and members to be interviewed. Hard-

to-find documents were also collected during site visits. Chapter 5 will elaborate in greater detail varieties of counter-hegemonic ideas and practices of SAM groups. The main focus of the interviews and site visits was in Surin and Yasothon provinces in the Northeast, where there are many organic rice farming groups and producer rice mills which process and sell their own products, both domestically and abroad. Around 35 people from these provinces were interviewed, and overall chapter 5 will utilise interviews of 55 people.

For the study of the LRM, interviews and site visits were focused on community land title deed (CLTD) groups in Chiang Mai and Lamphun provinces in the North, which is where CLTD ideas originated. Chapter 6 will provide more detail of these communities. Another site visit was at Klongyong co-operative in Nakhonpratom province, which had been given a formal land deed in the form of a CLTD. The thesis also discusses CLTD projects in other regions of the country, as well as other attempts to challenge hegemonic governance of land, in order to give a comprehensive overview of the LRM. In addition, some interviews of LRM members from other regions in Thailand were conducted in Bangkok, when the LRM staged a protest at Government House in October 2012. Overall, interviews of around 30 to 35 people will be used in chapter 6.

The thesis relies on interviews of key figures of the SAM and the LRM, as well as heads and/or representatives of private and public organisations, such as the BioThai Foundation and the Land Reform Office, because they are persons who usually have extensive experiences and are in the positions to influence their networks. Based on literature reviews and interviews, subjected to constant additions and revisions throughout the field research, the thesis identified various key

academics, civil servants, NGOs, farmers' leaders, and corporate managers in the agri-food system in Thailand. Site visits were often facilitated through contacts with local NGOs. Access to sites and interviewees were sufficient for the purpose of this thesis, but occasionally some interviews had to be conducted by telephone or email exchanges. A few people also refused to give interviews. Aside from people at leadership levels, members of SAM and LRM groups were also interviewed. However, due to the lack of time to familiarise oneself with the locations and to establish trust, it was not possible to interview people in visited sites according to, for example, differences in gender, age, social and economic classes. In some groups, those who were willing to give interviews were often male, and were able to communicate well in Central Thai dialect. Interviewing a few people concurrently also occurred during site visits, to save interviewees' time and to encourage them to participate more in the discussions.

The main questions asked during interviews differed from person to person in terms of focus and wordings, but essentially interviewees were asked to identify, explain and/or give examples of various characteristics of the current mainstream agri-food system in Thailand, based on their direct experiences and/or their study of the agri-food system. They were also asked to explain their (or their organisation's) responses to perceived problems of the mainstream agri-food system, and obstacles that they face. Open-ended and specific essential questions were asked, as well as probing questions to encourage interviewees to explain some answers in greater detail.

The author tried to be sensitive by asking interview questions using words that interviewees were accustomed to, and sometimes started interviews by using

simple "ice-breaker" questions, or varied the settings of the interviews to be less formal, to establish rapport with the interviewees. It took accumulated interview experience, time and a lot of on-the-spot observations to be sensitive towards different types of interviewees, and to formulate questions using appropriate words. For example, when a farmer in the LRM was asked to describe other problems facing small-scale farmers in his community aside from access to land, he said that there were none. However, follow-up questions revealed that there were prevalent cases of chronic agricultural debts in his community. The initial question did not help to get satisfactory information, because the farmers did not see debts as a "problem", as most farmers he knew had debts.<sup>47</sup> Such instances reminded the author to ask clearer and more specific questions. Another example is how some farmers opened up more when they were interviewed together in groups, or while walking on their farms, compared to when they were interviewed alone in more formal settings.

During the interviews, the author took voice-recordings and also took notes of important points discussed. To process these data into a useful format, the author did not use any software and manually arranged important points from each interview and important quotations under broad categories, such as that of hegemony, counter-hegemony, co-optation, and other factual information. Subsequent readings of the notes allowed the author to reflect more carefully about how to use these interview information because some issues do not always fall neatly into such categories. During the writing stage of the research, the author re-arranged important points from the interviews into sub-categories to correspond with sub-

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<sup>47</sup> Mr. Wichai (undisclosed surname), a farmer from Tambol Aynalai, Ampur Wiengsa, Naan province, interviewed 1 October 2012 during the LRM's protest in Bangkok.

sections in each chapter, such as land issues, monopoly power, and counter-hegemonic visions.

As for ethical considerations, the University of Warwick suggests that PhD researchers should obtain signed consent forms from interviewees before interviews commence. However, to be sensitive towards Thai social contexts and to interviewees from various backgrounds who might be skeptical of signing documents, the author did not ask for signed consent forms from interviewees. Still, interviews proceeded only after interviewees gave verbal indications that they were willing to participate and to be voice-recorded. Moreover, prior to the interviews, the author explained the nature of the project, how the data was going to be used, and discussed the level of confidentiality that the interviewees were comfortable with. Interviewees were encouraged to ask questions about the project, and copies of general information about the PhD project were given to some interviewees who needed more information. Resources to conduct the field research came from the Thai Office of the Higher Education Commission as part of the author's PhD scholarship, but the funder in no way interfered with the research design or the content of this thesis.

## **Part 5: Summary of the main arguments**

In sum, this thesis argues that the agri-food system in Thailand has been shaped by domestic and transnational hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces to varying extents, and is continually evolving. Counter-hegemonic forces currently have rather limited power to influence and direct the agri-food system in Thailand towards more socially and ecologically sustainable paths, partly due to hegemonic power's co-optation of oppositions and other structural limitations. To overcome existing



problems and limitations, counter-hegemonic movements in the agri-food system in Thailand must continue to refine and develop their counter-hegemonic ideas and practices, step-up on national political struggles, broaden their alliances, as well as further explore or deepen transnational collaborations. Within this overall line of argument there are four main points.

First, the thesis argues that the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand has been shaped to aid capital accumulation by domestic and transnational hegemonic forces, and is sustained through the maintenance of hegemonic agri-food production-distribution, governance structures and ideational order. Important participants in the maintenance of the status quo often include transnational capital and global governance bodies, large domestic capital, and the Thai state. Hegemonic neo-liberal ideas and practices in the agri-food system in Thailand have also been strengthened by some cultural-political ideologies and practices specific to Thai historical-social context, namely the "Sakdina" (feudal/hierarchical) mentality and patron-client relations.

Second, the thesis argues that the SAM's and the LRM's counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices, and governance structures have managed to influence the agri-food system in Thailand and offer alternatives to certain extents. Both the SAM and the LRM are influenced by local, national, as well as global factors. Hence, despite how they mostly operate within local and national boundaries, the SAM and the LRM should be seen as part of global counter-hegemonic forces in the agri-food system. Despite some progress, there are still structural problems and limitations which prevent transformational changes of the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand.

Third, the thesis argues that hegemonic forces have many measures to co-opt dissent, alternative and reformist forces into hegemonic structures. To an extent, such measures have weakened alternative movements. The line between counter-hegemony and co-optation of oppositions is often unclear. Nevertheless, some examples of co-optation include attempts by large agri-businesses to green-wash themselves by using similar terms as those in the SAM, as well as some conservative forms of Thai localism and rural populist policies implemented by the Thai state.

Fourth, the thesis argues that counter-hegemony should be seen as an un-linear ongoing process over a long period of time, where forces that are predominantly counter-hegemonic may at times retain some hegemonic elements. The threat of co-optation suggests that counter-hegemonic forces should continually refine and develop clear ideas and practices to guard against co-optation. In addition, to implement structural reforms on wider scales and to bring about significant transformations of the mainstream agri-food system, it is unavoidable to organise politically to challenge local, national, and global hegemonic governance structures. This suggests that counter-hegemonic forces should continue to broaden their domestic and transnational alliances, as well as refine their ideological goals and analytical framework.

## **Part 6: Chapter outline**

This opening chapter has established the contemporary relevance of the thesis research topic, as well as the objectives, central research question and sub-questions of the thesis. It has also discussed six main original contributions to knowledge of the thesis with reference to existing literature; reviewed the theoretical framework, methodology and data collection; and summarised the main arguments of the thesis.

Chapter 2 will discuss problems of the current global corporate agri-food system and provide a critique of mainstream neo-classical economics theoretical framework. It will also outline the alternative neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework adopted in this thesis, with additional insights from poststructuralist and feminist perspectives. Through the neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework, the current corporate agri-food system is understood as an integral part of capitalist accumulation. However, the agri-food system is being shaped and reshaped by hegemonic as well as counter-hegemonic forces. Material and ideational structures that sustain the corporate agri-food system can be seen as part of the hegemonic forces, whereas forces which try to change and transform such mainstream ideas and practices are classified as counter-hegemonic forces.

Chapter 3 will advance the first main argument of this thesis, which is that the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand has been shaped to aid capital accumulation processes by domestic and transnational hegemonic forces, and is sustained through the maintenance of hegemonic agri-food production-distribution, governance structures and ideational order. The first part of the chapter will discuss hegemonic agri-food production-distribution in Thailand, which involves issues such as unsustainable industrialised production methods, land grabs, financial speculations of agri-food commodities, and monopoly power in the agri-food sector. The second part of the chapter will discuss hegemonic governance structures which facilitate the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand, with emphasis on the roles of domestic forces, such as the Thai state, and transnational forces such as global governance bodies. The last part of the chapter will discuss hegemonic ideational order, which is a combination of transnational hegemonic ideas and domestic historical-cultural mentality in Thailand, such as that of patron-client relations,

which aid capital accumulation through the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand.

Chapter 4 will provide a comprehensive overview of counter-hegemony and co-optation of oppositions in the agri-food system in Thailand, which serve as a foundation for the study of the SAM and the LRM in chapters 5 and 6. In addition to providing an overview of the SAM's and the LRM's counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices and governance structures, this chapter will suggest that the movements can be understood partly as a lineage of past agrarian movements in Thailand, and as part of Thai civil society's search for alternative developmental paths. Moreover, this chapter will suggest that polarised political conditions and rural populist policies in Thailand hinder counter-hegemonic efforts of the SAM and the LRM, as well as opening room for co-optation of oppositions. The chapter will also explore the paddy pledging scheme as a case study of co-optative rural populist policy.

Chapter 5 will focus on the SAM in Thailand. It will elaborate on the SAM's counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses, production-distribution practices, and governance structures. The reason that counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses are discussed first (unlike in chapter 3 where hegemonic production-distribution practices are discussed first) is because the SAM (and also the LRM) based its counter-hegemonic ideas and practices on critiques of the current system. Topics to be discussed in chapter 5 include, for example, a summary of the SAM's counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses, organic agriculture, green market channels, as well as sustainable farmer groups and producer rice mills in Surin and Yasothon provinces. Counter-hegemonic obstacles, grey areas, and possibilities of co-optation

of oppositions will also be explored. This will include discussions of the critiques of Thai localism and sustainable agriculture, as well as the roles of the private sector and the Thai state in sustainable agriculture. Overall, chapter 5 will help to advance the second and third main arguments of the thesis: namely, that although the mainstream agri-food system is dominated by hegemonic capitalist interests, domestic and transnational counter-hegemonic forces can influence some changes in the system, even though they are faced with limitations and co-optation of oppositions. This chapter will also support the fourth main argument of the thesis, which is that counter-hegemony should be seen as an un-linear process over a long period of time.

Chapter 6 will examine counter-hegemony and co-optation of oppositions in the case of the LRM. Similar to the preceding chapter on the SAM, chapter 6 will support the second, third and fourth main arguments of the thesis. It will argue that the LRM tries to develop complementary counter-hegemonic ideas, governance structures, as well as production-distribution practices, to challenge the primacy of private individual rights and to promote de-commodification of land, as well as equitable distribution and sustainable usage of land. The concept of the complexity of rights, community land title deed (CLTD), and a national campaign to challenge existing legal and policy governance of land will be discussed. In addition, this chapter will explore obstacles facing the LRM and possibilities of co-optation given the global context and contemporary Thai politics. The discussions will cover, for example, violence and legal persecutions facing the LRM, how political polarisation may weaken the LRM, and obstacles facing the LRM in its engagement with counter-hegemonic struggles at the global level.

Chapter 7 will restate the central research question and reflect on the main arguments advanced in previous chapters. It will also provide a summary of contributions to knowledge, assess the implications of the research finding for knowledge and practice, reflect on the research experience, and outline areas for future research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Dynamics of the Global Capitalist Agri-Food System**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 1 has discussed that there is a need to address problems of the current agri-food system, and that this thesis attempts to contribute by asking the central research question "how have hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces shaped the agri-food system in Thailand (1990 to 2014)?" As a first step in elaborating an answer to this central research question, this chapter evaluates different theoretical approaches to construct what it deems to be the most convincing and appropriate analytical framework in respect of the agri-food system in Thailand. The chapter does so by first discussing the inadequacy of mainstream neo-classical economics approach. It then provides alternative conceptual framework, based mainly on neo-Marxist and Gramscian perspectives, to help analyse the agri-food system in Thailand.

To understand the forces that shape the agri-food system, as well as possibilities of changes in favour of ecological and social sustainability, this chapter discusses how the thesis can draw on neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical perspectives, with supplementary insights from feminist and poststructuralist perspectives. In this chapter and throughout the thesis, the current mainstream agri-food system is understood as an integral part of capitalist accumulation, supported by mainstream neo-classical economics and neo-liberal ideology. In answering the central research question, concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony are used to classify the main forces which shape the agri-food system. Production-distribution practices, governance structures and ideas that sustain the mainstream agri-food

system can be seen as part of hegemonic forces, whereas counter-hegemonic forces are those which try to change, reform and transform the hegemonic agri-food system toward more social and ecological sustainable paths. Overall, the theoretical framework of the thesis tries to explain the dynamics of the agri-food system as something which is continually being shaped and re-shaped by hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces. The chapter also uses a Gramscian concept of co-optation of oppositions to explore hegemonic forces' attempts to integrate or subsume dissent so that it does not become a major threat to the status quo.

The first part of this chapter briefly discusses problems of the capitalist agri-food system, with some references to circumstances in Thailand. Part 2 then shows how the problems are intertwined with neo-classical economics and neo-liberal ideologies, which makes neo-classical theoretical framework unsuitable for this thesis. An alternative neo-Marxist framework, discusses in part 3, enables one to understand the agri-food system as part of capital accumulation, riddled with structural political-economic and ecological problems. Part 4 then discusses Gramscian concepts of hegemony, counter-hegemony, and co-optation of oppositions in the agri-food system, while part 5 discusses supplementary insights from poststructuralist and feminist perspectives.

### **Part 1: Problems of the mainstream capitalist agri-food system**

A wide range of studies suggest that the current mainstream capitalist agri-food system has some serious structural ecological and political-economic problems. This part of the chapter briefly discusses how the industrial agricultural production methods are ecologically unsustainable and work against small-scale farmers. So-called "free trade" rules benefit countries unequally, while mono-cropping and cash-



cropping for export create dependency and increase food insecurity in some countries. In addition, the supposed "free market" conceals the power of monopolies in agri-food chains. Growing interests in agro-fuels, large-scale acquisitions of land in developing countries or "land grabs", and financial speculations in agricultural commodity markets in recent years, are also important problems of the mainstream agri-food system.

### ***1.1) Production***

The Green Revolution, promoted around the world by institutions such as Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, the US and other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) governments since the Second World War, helped transfer techniques such as plant breeding and the dissemination of High Yielding Variety seeds (HYVs) throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> The yield of HYVs depends on complementary capital-intensive soil management practices (fertilisers, agri-chemicals, irrigation), which often do not benefit small-scale farmers in marginal resource-scarce land.<sup>2</sup> The associated biological simplification and standardisation of mono-cropping and intellectual property seeds are connected to the loss of indigenous species and biodiversity that increase genetic vulnerability, local biological knowledge in farming, and vulnerability to the spread of pests, weeds, fungi and disease.<sup>3</sup> As resistance to agri-chemicals/pesticides develops, it is likely to

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<sup>1</sup> David Goodman and Michael Redclift, "Internationalization and the Third World Food Crisis," in *Refashioning Nature: Food, Ecology and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 151-152.

<sup>2</sup> For example: Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution. Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics* (London: Zed Books, 1991), 45; Clara Ines Nicholls and Miguel A. Altieri, "Conventional Agricultural Development Models and the Persistence of the Pesticide Treadmill in Latin America," *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology* 4, no. 2 (1997), 94.

<sup>3</sup> Tony Weis, "The Accelerating Biophysical Contradictions of Industrial Capitalist Agriculture," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 10, no. 3 (2010), 320; Shiva (1991), 89 and 93-95.

lead to increased economic costs in farming.<sup>4</sup> Chapter 3 will discuss in greater detail the Green Revolution experience in Thailand. There is evidence, for example, of environmental degradations, as well as linkages between industrial agri-food production and rising debts of farmers.<sup>5</sup>

Repeating the experience of the Green Revolution and HYVs is the attempt to promote genetically modified (GM) seeds improvement technology as "magic bullets" to drive change and innovation in agriculture by the corporate sector and the World Bank,<sup>6</sup> even though it is scientifically unproven that GM seeds are higher-yielding, better adapted to climate change, and are thus the answer to world hunger.<sup>7</sup> The technology and associated intellectual property rights system can help to increase monopoly power of large transnational agri-businesses,<sup>8</sup> in addition to possible increased in ecological, social and economic costs. Many scientists have given a variety of reasons to suggest that large-scale uses of transgenic crops pose a series of environmental risks that threaten the sustainability of agriculture.<sup>9</sup> Adding with the fact that farmers may have to pay inflated-price for these patent seeds, and accompanying pesticide packages, as well as bear the consequences of GM contamination and loss of export markets, GM seeds arguably have high economic

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<sup>4</sup> See Nicholls and Altieri (1997), 97-99, for a case study in Latin America.

<sup>5</sup> A comprehensive study of such problems include Pattama Sittichai and et al., *A Complete Report on the Project to Compile and Analyse the Problems of Farmers and Sustainable Development* (Bangkok: National Economics and Social Development Board (NESDB), 2002). (in Thai)

<sup>6</sup> Shelly Feldman and Stephen Biggs, "The Politics of International Assessments: The IAASTD Process, Reception and Significance," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 12, no. 1 (2012), 146.

<sup>7</sup> For example: D. Gurian-Sherman, *Failure to Yield: Evaluating the Performance of Genetically Engineered Crops*. (Cambridge: Unions of Concerned Scientists, 2009), quoted in Giménez and Shattuck (2011), 119; United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), *Genetically Engineered Crops for Pest Management* (Washington DC: USDA Economic Research Service, 1999); Dominic Glover, "Is Bt Cotton a Pro-Poor Technology? A Review and Critique of the Empirical Record," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 10, no. 4 (2010), 500-503.

<sup>8</sup> M. Blakeney, "Recent Developments in Intellectual Property and Power in the Private Sector Related to Food and Agriculture," *Food Policy* 36 (2011): 109–113, quoted in Sage (2013), 72.

<sup>9</sup> Miguel A. Altieri and Peter Rosset, "Ten Reasons Why Biotechnology Will Not Ensure Food Security, Protect the Environment and Reduce Poverty in the Developing World," *AgBioForum* 2, no. 3&4 (1999): 155–162. Other studies include, for example, Goldberg (1992), Paoletti and Pimentel (1996), Snow and Moran (1997), and Lutman (1999).

and social costs as well. In addition, it has been argued that the present GM seeds and chemical intensive technological trajectories may lock out agro-ecological innovations.<sup>10</sup> In Thailand, even though the Thai state has not approved of commercial-scale plantation of GM crops, news and evidence of GM papaya contaminations have already complicated Thai papaya exports to the European Union (EU),<sup>11</sup> not to mention that there is continuing lobbying attempts by transnational agri-businesses, such as Monsanto, for Thailand to promote GM seeds.<sup>12</sup>

### ***1.2) International trade***

The neo-liberal agri-food production and trade under the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) governance, specifically the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) implemented in 1995, established a set of binding obligations on members. These obligations include limitation and reduction of tariffs and quotas, domestic subsidies to farmers beyond market prices, and export subsidies which allow surplus production to be sold on world markets at prices below the costs of production, often referred to as "dumping".<sup>13</sup> The rules, however, have not been applied to all countries to the same extent. The EU and the US continued to give farm subsidies, and many developing countries were unable to protect their farm sectors from such food imports that had artificially been cheapened via subsidies, while at the same time faced restricted

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<sup>10</sup> Gaetan Vanloqueren and Philippe V. Baret, "How Agricultural Research Systems Shape a Technological Regime That Develops Genetic Engineering but Locks Out Agroecological Innovations," *Research Policy* 38 (2010): 971–83, quoted in David Wield, Joanna Chataway, and Maurice Bolo, "Issues in the Political Economy of Agricultural Biotechnology" 10, no. 3 (2010), 356.

<sup>11</sup> Bangkok Business Newspaper, "EU Warns against GM Papaya," July 03, 2012. (in Thai)

<sup>12</sup> Bangkok Post (online), "Fresh Struggle Kicks off to Halt GM Crops," October 24, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Bill Pritchard, "Trading into Hunger? Trading Out of Hunger? International Food Trade and the Debate on Food Security," in *Food Systems Failure: The Global Food Crisis and the Future of Agriculture*, ed. Christopher Rosin, Paul Stock, and Hugh Campbell (London: Earthscan, 2012), 48–49.

access to foreign markets.<sup>14</sup> Neo-liberal structural adjustment policies, imposed by institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), also intensified the reduction in farmer support mechanisms.<sup>15</sup>

Based on the belief in comparative advantage and free trade, developing countries have been encouraged to specialise and grow high-value cash-crops for export. This reduces their domestic food security and, at the same time, increases their dependence on imports of artificially cheap subsidised staple food grains such as wheat, rice, and maize from advanced capitalist countries. In many developing countries, farmland that used to grow food for domestic consumption now grows luxuries for higher-income consumers and overseas market.<sup>16</sup> This problem of food dependence and insecurity is exacerbated in recent years with the growing production of agro-fuels and financial speculations, which are discussed in later sections. Even though Thailand is food sufficient at the national level, monocropping for export and some free trade agreements have caused a lot of economic risks and problems for small-scale farmers, as chapter 3 will discuss.

### ***1.3) Agri-businesses and monopoly power***

There are studies which suggest that large transnational firms have monopoly power to influence agri-food chains in various ways at the expense of smaller-scale producers and consumers, through monopoly controls over inputs (such as seeds),<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For example, see Geoffrey Lawrence and Philip McMichael, "The Question of Food Security," *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 19, no. 2 (2012), 135.

<sup>15</sup> Raj Patel, *Stuffed and Starved. Power and the Hidden Battle for the World Food System* (London: Portobello Books, 2007), quoted in Lawrence and McMichael (2012), 135.

<sup>16</sup> For example, see: John Madeley, *Hungry for Trade. How the Poor Pay for Free Trade*. (London: Zed Books, 2000), 54-56.

<sup>17</sup> For example: Wield, Chataway, and Bolo (2010), 347; ETC group, "Global Seed Industry Concentration," *Communiqué* 90 (2005); ETC group, "Concentration in Corporate Power," *Communiqué* 91 (2005).

trade, processing and distribution channels. At the global level, agri-food trade, processing and retail are subjected to business concentration and monopoly power.<sup>18</sup> Aside from using their market power, large agri-businesses can also influence the agri-food system through lobbying for certain government policies and regulations. Neo-liberal policies (such as liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation) have enabled large agri-industrial transnational corporations to increase their political and market power in many countries, and to promote certain agricultural production technologies.<sup>19</sup> Neo-liberal policies have also helped to increase monopoly power in agri-food processing and trade industries in many countries, which drive up prices at consumers' expenses. In Mexico, after the signing of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), prices of US corn imports fell by 50 percent, but tortilla prices in Mexico tripled during the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> With two food processors which control over 97 percent of the industrial corn flour market, as well as reduction of state food subsidies and wages, tortilla riots became common.<sup>21</sup> As chapter 3 will discuss, transnational Thai and non-Thai agri-businesses play an important role in shaping the agri-food system in Thailand.

#### ***1.4) The food-energy complex and agro-fuels***

The ecological unsustainability of the current corporate agri-food system is very clear when one look at its dependence on finite fossil fuels, principally oil and

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<sup>18</sup> See: Lawrence Busch and Carmen Bain, "New! Improved? The Transformation of the Global Agrifood System," *Rural Sociology* 69, no. 3 (2004): 321–346; ETC group, "Concentration in Corporate Power," (2005).

<sup>19</sup> For example: Miguel Teubal, "Peasant Struggles for Land and Agrarian Reform in Latin America," in *Peasants and Globalization: Political Economy, Rural Transformation and the Agrarian Question*, ed. A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi and Cristobal Kay (New York: Routledge, 2009), 155-157; Zulkuf Aydin, "Neo-Liberal Transformation of Turkish Agriculture," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 10, no. 2 (2010), 161 and 182-183.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Rosset, *Food Is Different. Why We Must Get the WTO Out of Agriculture* (London: Zed Books, 2006), 57, quoted in Philip McMichael, "A Food Regime Analysis of the 'World Food Crisis,'" *Agriculture and Human Values* 26, no. 4 (July 31, 2009), 289.

<sup>21</sup> Patel (2007), 53, quoted in McMichael, "A Food Regime Analysis," (2009), 289.

natural gas, which is needed in mechanised production methods, agricultural inputs (fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides, which may be derived from petrochemicals), and transport of agri-food products.<sup>22</sup> One estimate suggests that industrial agriculture requires an average 10 calories of fossil fuels to produce a single calorie of food.<sup>23</sup> Because of the food-fuel connection, rising energy costs are likely to translate to rising costs of production and food prices, which become burdens to both farmers and consumers.

Due to the growing fear of "peak oil" or the scarcity of fossil fuel energy in recent years, there is increasing diversion of agri-food production resources and agri-food products from food consumption uses to the production of agro-fuels, which might raise food prices and food insecurity. For most forms of first generation agro-fuels (that are available in the short and medium run), the aggregate fossil energy used in the production of agro-fuels is higher than the energy contained in agro-fuel outputs, not to mention that agro-fuels output per land area is also low.<sup>24</sup> This shows that agro-fuels might exacerbate both the energy problems and the ecological-social unsustainability of the current agri-food system. The agri-food system in Thailand is also reliant on fossil fuels and, as chapter 3 will discuss, it is likely that agri-food resources will be increasingly diverted to agro-fuels production.

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<sup>22</sup> For example: Philip McMichael, "Banking on Agriculture: A Review of the World Development Report 2008," *Africa* 9, no. 2 (2009), 242; Sage, "The Interconnected Challenges for Food Security from a Food Regimes Perspective: Energy, Climate and Malconsumption," (2013), 75.

<sup>23</sup> McCluney, "Renewable Energy Limits," (2005) and Manning, "The Oil We Eat: Following The Food Chain Back to Iraq," (2004) and Pollan, "Farmer in Chief," (2008), quoted in Weis (2010), 321.

<sup>24</sup> Pimentel and Patzek, "Ethanol Production Using Corn, Switchgrass, and Wood; Biodiesel Production Using Soybean and Sunflower," (2005), Patzek and Pimentel, "Thermodynamics of Energy Production from Biomass," (2006), quoted in Weis (2010), 325.

### **1.5) Land grabs**

Liberalisation policies have enabled captures of resources by international investors in developing countries. In recent years, many have noted unprecedented phenomenon of "land grabs", which usually refers to large-scale land acquisitions in land-abundant countries, especially following the 2007/2008 hikes in world food prices. Both private and public entities participate in land grabs, often with goals of securing food and energy for their own purposes, or for distribution in their countries.<sup>25</sup> Beliefs in the benefits of large-scale farms and comparative advantages are often used to justify large-scale corporate land grabs.<sup>26</sup> However, there are concerns over negative environmental effects and over how small-scale farmers and rural population might be forced off of their land, which will intensify existing ecological and social problems of the current agri-food system. The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Oliver De Schutter, points out that there are opportunity costs involved in large-scale land purchases by investors, as the land could have been used in alternative ways for more pro-poor effects and to benefit local farming households.<sup>27</sup> Land issues in the Thai context will be discussed in greater detail in chapters 3 and 6.

### **1.6) Financialisation and the agri-food system**

It has been suggested that the conjunction of food, energy and financial problems, have prompted international capital markets to engage in speculative ventures in

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<sup>25</sup> United Nations, *Foreign Land Purchases for Agriculture: What Impact on Sustainable Development?*, 2010; GRAIN, *Seized! The 2008 Land Grab for Food and Financial Security* (Barcelona: GRAIN, 2008); Julia Behrman, Ruth Meinzen-Dick, and Agnes Quisumbing, "The Gender Implications of Large-Scale Land Deals," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 1 (2012), 51.

<sup>26</sup> P. Collier, "Politics of Hunger: How Illusion and Greed Fan the Food Crisis," *Foreign Affairs*, (2008), quoted in Ben White et al., "The New Enclosures: Critical Perspectives on Corporate Land Deals," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3–4 (July 2012), 625.

<sup>27</sup> Olivier De Schutter, "How Not to Think of Land-Grabbing: Three Critiques of Large-Scale Investments in Farmland," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 2 (March 2011), 256.

land, food and agro-fuels.<sup>28</sup> In the past few years, financial institutions have become increasingly involved at all points of the agri-food system, investing in farmland, input supplies, storage and logistics, inspection and certification, food production and processing, commodity trading, retailing and food services.<sup>29</sup> This potentially allows them to have the capacity to alter the conditions or to re-organise various stages of agri-food supply chains. In recent years, non-commercial speculators, such as hedge funds, have also entered futures market in large numbers to bet on rising prices of food commodities.<sup>30</sup> Agricultural commodity speculations partially helped to inflate a price bubble that has pushed the costs of basic foodstuffs beyond the reach of the poor in many countries between 2007 and 2008.<sup>31</sup> The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) noted that, by June 2008, a significant portion of the price volatility in international food markets was beyond what could be explained by the underlying supply and demand. Futures prices for wheat, for example, were 60 percent beyond what the market fundamentals would dictate in March 2008.<sup>32</sup> While these financial actors may benefit from the boom, rapidly falling prices after the bubble bursts can harshly affect millions of food producers throughout the world.<sup>33</sup> To a certain extent, Thailand is affected by fluctuating international prices of agricultural commodities prompted by speculations, as will be discussed in chapter 3. Moreover, chapter 4 will discuss how the "speculation fever" had also inspired the Thai government's paddy pledging scheme, which exacerbates problems of the

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<sup>28</sup> For example, see Philip McMichael, "The Land Grab and Corporate Food Regime Restructuring," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3–4 (July 2012), 690.

<sup>29</sup> David Burch and Geoffrey Lawrence, "Towards a Third Food Regime: Behind the Transformation," *Agriculture and Human Values* 26, no. 4 (July 31, 2009), 271.

<sup>30</sup> For example, see: Jennifer Clapp, "Food Price Volatility and Vulnerability in the Global South: Considering the Global Economic Context," *Third World Quarterly* 30, no. 6 (September 2009), 1187.

<sup>31</sup> Peter M. Rosset, "Food Sovereignty and the Contemporary Food Crisis," *Development* 51, no. 4 (2008), 461.

<sup>32</sup> FAO, *Food Outlook*, (Rome: FAO, June 2008), 55-57, quoted in Clapp (2009), 1186.

<sup>33</sup> Rosset (2008), 461.



mainstream agri-food system, as well as hinder sustainable agriculture development in Thailand.

## **Part 2: A critique of neo-classical economics and neo-liberal ideologies**

The diversity of the problems discussed in part 1, such as land grabs and monopoly power in agri-food chains, may give the impressions that these are issues to be addressed separately. However, underlying threads linking these problems include neo-classical economic policy prescriptions and theoretical perspectives. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to make original contributions to knowledge by providing a comprehensive critique of neo-classical economics, and the thesis recognises that other scholars in the fields of Political Economy and Economics have provided much more comprehensive and extensive critiques elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> This part of the chapter, based on some of such critiques and the author's study of neo-classical economics, briefly discusses how the social, political-economic and ecological problems of the (global and Thai) agri-food system are intertwined with neo-classical economics and neo-liberal ideologies. It starts with a discussion on how attempts to address social and ecological ills of the current agri-food system, which do not depart from neo-classical perspectives, are likely to be counter-productive because neo-classical perspectives are part of the illness to begin with. This part of the chapter then summarises the flaws and inadequacy of some of the main tenets of neo-classical

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<sup>34</sup> For some examples, see: Frank Stilwell, "The Ideology of the Market: Neoclassical Economics," in *Political Economy: The Contest of Economic Ideas*, 3rd ed. (Victoria: Oxford University Press, 2012), 149–210; Dimitris Milonakis, "Neoclassical Economics," in *The Elgar Companion to Marxist Economics*, ed. Ben Fine, Alfredo Saad-Filho, and Marco Boffo (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2012), 246–251; Herman E. Daly and Joshua Farley, *Ecological Economics: Principles and Applications* (Washington DC: Island Press, 2004). For example, from an Economics disciplinary perspective, Weeks (2012) provides a critique of neo-classical economics as being taught in universities, rejects the automatically adjusting market neoclassical belief, and supports basic reforms to regulate markets in the public interests. (John Weeks, *The Irreconcilable Inconsistencies of Neoclassical Macroeconomics* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 207 and 236

ideologies as a theoretical approach, to understand how the agri-food system could be transformed towards more socially and ecologically sustainable paths.

After the 2007/2008 hikes in prices of agri-food products, there has been a renewed interest in issues of agriculture and food. Mainstream discourses on food security tend to focus mainly on analysing factors which affect market demand and supply, and often support market-based solutions and technological fixes to increase productivity.<sup>35</sup> Based on ideologies of economic liberalism and free-market fundamentalism, some international finance and development institutions (such as the IMF, WTO, World Bank), major transnational agri-food monopolies (such as Cargill, Monsanto, Carrefour, Tesco, Wal-Mart), agricultural policies of the G-8 (US Farm Bill, EU's Common Agricultural Policy), and big philanthropy capital (the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), continue to call for the intensification of neo-liberal policies, such as further deregulations of land and labour markets for large-scale investments in agro-fuels production and industrial farming.<sup>36</sup> The Gates Foundation, for example, advocates increasing agricultural output through corporatized technological innovation and the expansion of global markets.<sup>37</sup> Calls for investments in agriculture are also often accompanied by arguments in favor of genetically modified (GM) crops.<sup>38</sup> Such discourses and policy prescriptions over-

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<sup>35</sup> For example, see executive summaries in FAO, *How to Feed the World in 2050* (Rome, 2009), 1-3 and Global Harvest Initiative, *Accelerating Productivity Growth: The 21st Century Global Agriculture Challenge. A White Paper on Agricultural Policy*, 2009, i-iii. Other studies make similar arguments include Philip McMichael, "Peasants Make Their Own History, But Not Just as They Please...", *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8, no. July (2008), 224 and James Kirwan and Damian Maye, "Food Security Framings Within the UK and the Integration of Local Food Systems," *Journal of Rural Studies* 29 (March 2012): 91-100.

<sup>36</sup> For further discussions on this topic, see Eric Holt Giménez and Annie Shattuck, "Food Crises, Food Regimes and Food Movements: Rumbblings of Reform or Tides of Transformation?," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 1 (January 2011), 119.

<sup>37</sup> Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, "Agricultural Development Strategy, 2008-2011," 11 July 2008, quoted in Holt Gimenez and Shattuck (2011), 116.

<sup>38</sup> For example, see: Mark Lynas, "Mark Lynas Plenary Speech for International Rice Congress 2014, Bangkok, Thailand," October 31, 2014, <<http://www.marklynas.org/2014/10/mark-lynas-plenary-speech-for-international-rice-congress-2014-bangkok-thailand/>>, retrieved 30 June 2015; Cargill,

simplify the causes of food price spikes and food insecurity, while at the same time neglect to address structural social-ecological problems and contradictions discussed in part 1. As the following paragraphs elaborate, there are flaws in the neo-classical economics framework which, when translate to policy prescriptions, have been major causes of the problems of the current agri-food system to begin with. Therefore, the views that intensifying the implementations of such policies will be beneficial, and that neo-classical economics is an appropriate framework to analyse and solve problems in the agri-food system, are highly problematic.

Neo-classical economics and neo-liberal views are embedded in the dominant discourses, policies and practices that have shaped the agri-food system in many countries throughout the world. There are variations across countries, but main characteristics include: commodification, specialisation and industrial methods in the production, distribution and consumption of agri-food products; support for large-scale enterprises and high technologies; trade and investment liberalisation of agri-food products and natural resources; as well as strict enforcement of private and intellectual property rights. Underlying such views and policy prescriptions are neo-classical economics and neo-liberalism ideologies<sup>39</sup> with general core beliefs in economic efficiency, comparative advantage, free market and free trade (with government interventions to aid the market economy), and private property rights, as the following paragraphs elaborate.

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“Food Security: The Challenge,” 2014, <<http://www.cargill.com>>, retrieved 30 June 2015; R. Paarlberg, *Starved for Science: How Biotechnology Is Being Kept Out of Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), quoted in Holt Gimenez and Shattuck (2011), 114.

<sup>39</sup> Neo-liberalism and neo-classical economics have similar beliefs with regards to the freedom of choice, ideal properties of markets, and minimal role of the state. (see further discussion in Stilwell (2012), 151 and 207-208)

There are many flaws to such a neo-classical theoretical approach. One important flaw is how the emphasis on economic efficiency - a structural imperative imposed on firms by competitive environments where firms must combine factors of production efficiently so that consumers obtain the product at the lowest possible cost<sup>40</sup> - is seen as most desirable, even if efficiency does not always translate to social and ecological well-being.<sup>41</sup> As part 1 briefly suggests, industrial agriculture does not take into account environmental and social externalities such as soil erosion and salinisation, the loss of biodiversity, and the costs to human physical and mental health.<sup>42</sup>

The belief in the benefits of free trade and markets in bringing competition and higher welfare, is often used as an argument in favour of liberalisation and deregulations. However, such belief conceals empirical reality where there is rarely "perfect competition" nor "free" trade as described in neo-classical economic textbooks, not to mention that market failures such as negative environmental externalities warrant some state interventions in the market. In effect, such rhetoric helps maintain existing unequal market and social relations. As part 1 has suggested, large transnational agri-businesses can be quite influential in the agri-food systems of many countries, and international trade regulations do not enforce free trade measures to all countries to equal extents. Moreover, it is doubtful that the promised benefits of specialisation in production based on comparative advantage<sup>43</sup> can be realised in the real world where countries compete to export agricultural

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<sup>40</sup> Stilwell (2012), 178.

<sup>41</sup> Ecological economic perspectives also criticise the neo-classical view that utility and welfare depend solely on people's preferences that are revealed through market transactions, while assuming that non-market goods contribute little to welfare (Daly and Farley (2004), 3-4).

<sup>42</sup> Weis (2010), 316-317.

<sup>43</sup> For an introductory discussion of these concepts, see Economics textbooks such as N. Gregory Mankiw, *Principles of Macroeconomics*, 5th ed. (Mason, OH: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2009), 54-56.

commodities and also, at the same time, face unequal access to other countries' markets. As discussed in part 1, developing countries are often advised to grow cash-crops for exports based on their comparative advantages, while advanced capitalist countries subsidise their domestic food grains production and protect their markets. Relying on few export crops and imports of other agri-food products to meet domestic food demands may be contradictory to the socially desirable goal of food security. Given recent developments such as land grabs, agro-fuels production, speculations, and the variability of climate due to global warming, there are increasing risks of production shortages and food price spikes. Chapter 3 will discuss these issues in greater detail using the case study of Thailand. Chapters 4 and 5 will then discuss different forms of alternative market governance structures, such as Community Support Agriculture and organic labels, which seek to embed market exchanges in social and ecological sustainable values in ways that distinguish these alternative markets from neo-classical economics' conception of free competitive markets which focuses on price competition.

Neo-classical economics' assumption that people are rational economic actors which act according to self-interests to maximise their utility,<sup>44</sup> as well as liberal values such as individualism and freedom, are sometimes used to justify certain consequences of neo-liberal market economy. They are also used to portray existing patterns of production, distribution, and consumption as inevitably the best outcome possible. A good example representing such views is the World Bank's development report (2008) which hides the consequences of dispossession and impoverishment through neo-liberal policies through the use of terms such as "choices" and "free

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<sup>44</sup> For an introduction to some of these basic concepts, see Mankiw (2009), 3-15 and other Economics textbooks.

will", as well as through the assertion that rural people rationally adapt their livelihood options and strategies to their resource endowments and constraints to achieve efficiency. For example, circumstances resulting in landlessness and the movement to wage labour, is interpreted as efficient adaptations (or even poverty-alleviating).<sup>45</sup> Such analyses neglect to take into account the importance of historical and socio-cultural contexts that shape unequal political-economic power and governance structures, which conditioned choices for individuals and different groups in society. Taking into account these factors, it is unjustifiable to believe that the mainstream market-led agri-food system is inevitable or the most desirable. Overall, such analytical frameworks which focus on individuals as the main unit of analysis, without considering structural dimensions, should be critically challenged.

Similarly, technological advances under the supposedly free market system are often seen uncritically as being political-economically neutral and desirable. However, commercial technologies are usually funded and promoted because they allow opportunities to maximise profits and/or rent from intellectual property rights, not because they are the best types of technologies from social and ecological perspectives. In the context of the agri-food system, GM seeds improvement technology is generally accepted in mainstream discourses, and is being identified with the notion of universal progress for humanity,<sup>46</sup> even though there is cause to believe that it might be a socially and ecologically unsustainable technology, as discussed in part 1. From neo-liberal perspectives, private intellectual property rights are important as incentives to innovate. However, it can be argued that private

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<sup>45</sup> Kojo Sebastian Amanor, "Global Food Chains, African Smallholders and World Bank Governance," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 9, no. 2 (April 2009), 256.

<sup>46</sup> G. Bridge, P. McManus, and T. Marsden, "The Next New Thing? Biotechnology and Its Discontents," *Geoforum* 34 (2003), 165, quoted in Jacqui Dibden, David Gibbs, and Chris Cocklin, "Framing GM Crops as a Food Security Solution," *Journal of Rural Studies* 29 (November 2011), 60.

intellectual property rights encourage self-interested individualism, as well as empower monopolies in the market. In mainstream perspectives, a lot of emphasis is put on the benefits of well-defined private property rights and intellectual property rights, with no room to analyse other types of rights, such as common or community rights, or other alternatives and beliefs, such as in public funding of research and the benefits of common knowledge. This narrow-mindedness could be a cost to society. One could question, for example, why GM seeds' profitability should be protected through intellectual properties rights that yield monopoly rents and fenced off as private, while in fact seeds have been developed by farmers for many generations without being patented, and can also alternatively be seen as part of the global commons. As chapters 4 to 6 will discuss, many people in the sustainable agriculture and land reform movements in Thailand criticise such way of thinking, and are also inspired by community right ideas and practices.

In summary, neo-classical economics theoretical framework offer rather narrow, reductionistic and unrealistic accounts of the current agri-food system. Its core beliefs, when translated into policy prescriptions, rhetoric and practices, provide ideological legitimation and support of the corporate control over the agri-food system. Such beliefs sustain problematic agri-food production-consumption practices while masking structural political-economic problems of the agri-food system. This is why the thesis cannot use neo-classical economics to construct its theoretical framework.

### **Part 3: Neo-Marxist critique of the capitalist agri-food system**

As Robert Cox suggests, "theory is always for someone and for some purpose".<sup>47</sup> Parts 1 and 2 have clearly suggested that neo-liberalism is a problematic theoretical framework which conceals political-economic and ecological problems of the agri-food system, and is incompatible with the emancipatory objective of this thesis, which is to understand the possibilities of transforming the agri-food system towards more ecologically and socially sustainable paths. Every theoretical approach could be subjected to critiques and shortcomings, but through a reading of different perspectives and evaluation of empirical evidence, the thesis has found neo-Marxist and Gramscian perspectives to be most convincing as a framework to understand the current agri-food system. While the neo-Marxist part of the theoretical framework helps the thesis to explore the dynamics of the capitalist agri-food system by bringing to light how capital accumulation tendency underlies seemingly unconnected social and ecological problems of the mainstream agri-food system, the Gramscian part of the theoretical framework helps the thesis to analyse material as well as ideational structures of the agri-food system. Together, the combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical approach sheds important light concerning alternative agri-food movements: neo-Marxist analysis of the hegemonic structures can be used to reflect on the transformative potential of alternative agri-food movements, while Gramscian concepts such as national-popular strategies and organic intellectuals can be used to explore agri-food movements in different social contexts. The Gramscian concept of co-optation of oppositions also enriches the neo-

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<sup>47</sup> Robert W. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 10 (1981), 128.



Marxist analysis of the capitalist agri-food system by suggesting how hegemonic forces have many measures to subsume dissent to maintain the status quo.

From neo-Marxist and Gramscian perspectives, the neo-liberal framework can be seen as part of the hegemonic ideology that sustains the current corporate agri-food system. This thesis views the global agricultural and food system as an integral part of the global capitalist economy, and that problems of the current agri-food system have their foundations in the capitalist system. Section 3.1 constructs a framework to explain how the general tendency of capital accumulation, and neo-liberal forces, shape the corporate agri-food system and its social-ecological problems, which have been discussed in part 1. Section 3.2 then discusses possibilities to resolve structural problems of the corporate agri-food system in ways that do not necessary benefit capital accumulation.

### ***3.1) The corporate agri-food system and capital accumulation***

Marxist analysis points to the tendency that capital are constantly seeking new ways to increase the rate of surplus value.<sup>48</sup> Two main channels of surplus appropriation are often discussed, usually with the focus on the exploitation of labour in the realm of production. First, capital can increase absolute surplus value by making workers work longer hours and/or make them work harder and faster per day, keeping wages at the same level. Second, they can increase relative surplus value by reducing wage costs, or by cutting down on their subsistence needs. Cutting wages may contribute to accumulation problems stemming from over-production/under-consumption. There are, however, many ways to alleviate accumulation problems, such as through

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<sup>48</sup> Surplus values are understood as differences between the values of commodities produced and the values of labour power/wages.

the exploitation of nature alongside the exploitation of labour, as the following paragraphs elaborate.

The exploitation of both humans and the ecological system can be observed through the study of linkages between agriculture, food and capital accumulation. Agriculture and food are linked to the accumulation process as determining factors of the value of labour power (wages) and the costs of raw materials.<sup>49</sup> On the one hand, lowering values of commodities consumed by workers, such as food, can reduce the value of labour and has equivalent effects to reducing wage costs.<sup>50</sup> It has been argued that during the 1980s and the 1990s, the global corporate food regime was generally characterised by low prices of traded agricultural commodities, at the expense of small-scale farmers, to provide cheap food for wage earners in the North whose wages were declining.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, cheaper raw materials and energy (circulating capital) has equivalent effects to that of raising labour productivity without having to increase fixed capital.<sup>52</sup> To keep the prices of circulating capital or raw materials down, there is a tendency for capital to continually seek new ways to appropriate "uncapitalised nature", such as by geographically expanding the frontiers of appropriation, where nature refers to both humans and extra-human nature such as food, energy and non-energy inputs, such as metals, wood, and fibers.<sup>53</sup> Land grabs in developing countries, following the 2007/2008 hikes in food prices and growing energy scarcity concerns, can be seen as manifestations of such tendency under the capitalist system. Expansions of mono-crops of key agricultural commodities can

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<sup>49</sup> Farshad Araghi, "Food Regimes and the Production of Value: Some Methodological Issues," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 30, no. 2 (2003), 45 and Jason W. Moore, "Transcending the Metabolic Rift: a Theory of Crises in the Capitalist World- Ecology," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 28, no. 1 (2011), 23.

<sup>50</sup> Araghi (2003), 44-45 and Moore (2011), 23.

<sup>51</sup> McMichael, "A Food Regime Analysis," (2009), 285.

<sup>52</sup> Moore (2011), 21-25.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 21-23.

also aid capital accumulation, as increased supply drives down prices. Chapter 3 will discuss problems of mono-crops for export in Thailand in greater detail.

The appropriation of extra-human nature, such as farmlands and other agricultural resources, helps to reduce the costs of raw materials, and also leads to the dispossessions of small-scale farmers or "depeasantisation", which serve to widen the pool of "reserve army of labour". The reserve army of labour, understood as the bulk of unemployed workers whose existence serves to discipline the employed labour force, can be one main channel to appropriate human nature (or surplus labour). If there is a large number of unemployed workers across the globe, the labour supply can be treated as almost unlimited, and there can be "super-exploitation" where capital purchases labour power below the cost of reproduction. This is because capital no longer has to be concerned about deteriorating health of workers, and can also exploit weaker organised resistance in certain countries. Longer working hours, more intensive work per day, and wage cuts can also be imposed.<sup>54</sup> With contract farming and increased popularity of hiring farm managers to manage large farm estates, such as in Thailand, situations of small-scale farmers/labourers and industrial workers become more similar.

This general mechanism which cheapens agri-food production inputs and materials to aid capital accumulation, can be described as "accumulation by dispossession" or the release of a set of assets at very low (and in some instances zero) costs for capital's benefits.<sup>55</sup> It is the continuation and proliferation of some processes of what Marx's called "primitive accumulation" practices.<sup>56</sup> Those that are related to agriculture and food include, for example, commodification and

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<sup>54</sup> Araghi (2003), 46 and 60.

<sup>55</sup> David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 149.

<sup>56</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 159.

privatisation of land, forceful expulsions of peasant populations, conversions of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights, and suppressions of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption. Moreover, new mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession have been created, which include rules on intellectual property (e.g. the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights or TRIPS agreement) that allow for the patenting and licensing of natural resources such as seeds, which have been developed by local populations over generations.<sup>57</sup> Commodification of nature escalates the depletion of the global environmental commons (land, air, water), and has resulted in all kinds of environmental degradations.<sup>58</sup> Free trade and open capital markets can also aid accumulation by dispossessions, as well as give advantages to monopoly powers in advanced capitalist countries that dominate trade, production, services and finance.<sup>59</sup> The credit system and finance capital have also become a major method of accumulation by dispossession, most importantly through "speculative raiding" of hedge funds and other major institutions of finance capital, which David Harvey has described as "the cutting edge of accumulation by dispossession in recent times".<sup>60</sup> Previous parts of this chapter have already discussed these issues in the context of the capitalist agri-food system.

Capital can also appropriate surplus through their power in market relations, not just in the realm of production. It has been noted by many neo-Marxists that the concentration and centralisation of capital, or the rise of monopoly capital, is a natural tendency of capitalist development. For example, in a study of agriculture in

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<sup>57</sup> Harvey (2003), 145-148.

<sup>58</sup> Harvey (2005), 160.

<sup>59</sup> Harvey (2003), 181.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

Latin America in the 1970s, Andre Gunder Frank observed how “monopoly in the modern sense refers to concentration in a universally interrelated whole”, which includes the monopolisation of land, other forms of capital, labour, commerce, finance, industry and technology.<sup>61</sup> Some empirical evidence on monopoly power in the agri-food system, previously discussed in part 1, suggest how large corporations can influence agri-food chains. In many countries including Thailand, there are small-scale farmers and/or semi-dispossessed peasantries (those who might potentially be part of the reserve labour) who still have ownership (or some access) to some of their means of production. Corporate capital and their chains of sub-contractors can appropriate their surplus via provisions of credit, seeds and other inputs, as well as market access, while labour process and partial ownership of means of production are left in the hands of direct producers.<sup>62</sup> In other words, monopoly power of large agri-businesses allow them to appropriate surplus from small-scale farmers through monopoly concentration of ownership and control over major productive resources such as land and seeds, monopoly control over the means of storage, transportation and distribution of agricultural products, as well as monopoly control over potentially productive investment funds. Chapter 3 will discuss how some contract farming arrangements in Thailand aid surplus appropriation in this manner.

The process of accumulation by dispossession in the agri-food system in Thailand will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. Important issues include: unequal distribution of land and conflicts over land use; attempts to introduce GM

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<sup>61</sup> André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brasil*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 243.

<sup>62</sup> Farshad Araghi, “The Invisible Hand and the Visible Foot: Peasants, Dispossession and Globalization,” in *Peasants and Globalization: Political Economy, Rural Transformation and the Agrarian Question*, ed. A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi and C. Kay (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 134.

seeds and to patent indigenous seeds; evidence of monopoly control over productive resources, trade, distribution channels and credits; state policies which encourage large agri-businesses' monopoly control over agri-food chains; industrial agri-food production technology package; and contract farming which represents the amalgamation of surplus appropriation from small-scale semi-dispossessed farmers. Due to many sources of accumulation by dispossessions, small-scale farmers in Thailand often rely on both farming (for subsistence and income) and on selling their labour power. Moreover, they often have to engage in intensive industrial farming production methods to free up their time so that they can also sell their labour power, even if it means increasing negative environmental externalities.<sup>63</sup> In other words, labour becomes complicit in the exploitation of nature for survival in the short run, even though they may be made worse off in the longer run (for example, with soil degradation and damage to health). This thesis also questions the modernisation view that there is (or ought to be) an on-going non-reversible transitional period where labourers move from the agricultural to industrial sectors in Thailand. As chapters 3 and 5 will discuss, rural-urban or agricultural-industrial and service sector dynamics in Thailand are much more complicated than that. For example, small-scale farming households and family farms in rural areas can be seen as social "safety nets" in case of unemployment or forced under-consumption.

At a global level, the process of capital accumulation is filtered through competitive market relations among very unequal states and global governance structures, such as the rules of the WTO that promote the mobility of capital and intellectual property rights.<sup>64</sup> States, including the Thai state, often internalise neo-

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<sup>63</sup> There are interviews, academic studies and income statistics of rural households from the Office of Agricultural Economics in Thailand to support these points, as will be discussed in chapters 3 to 6.

<sup>64</sup> Philip McMichael, "Peasant Prospects in the Neoliberal Age," *Development* 11, no. 3 (2006), 409.

liberal capitalist ideologies and have a very crucial role in supporting capital accumulation. In many countries, the state shoulders the problem of rising food prices through various food stabilisation measures, such as food subsidies, price controls and export restrictions, because rising food prices threaten the reproduction of labour.<sup>65</sup> With its monopoly of violence and definitions of legality, the state plays a crucial role in enabling accumulation by dispossession.<sup>66</sup> For example, the state can promote liberalisation through free trade agreements, privatise public assets, withdraw farm and rural subsidies, or allow land and agriculture to be accumulated in corporate hands.<sup>67</sup> Chapter 3 will discuss mainstream agri-food governance in Thailand, while chapter 6 will discuss suppressions of the land reform movements in Thailand in greater detail.

### ***3.2) Crisis and change ?***

Evidence of many social and ecological problems of the current capitalist agri-food system, such as those previously discussed in part 1, provide grounds for some people to discuss structural contradictions which will lead to crisis and change. The food-energy connection is a good example of contradictions within the system. Cheap fuel is important for capital accumulation, but so is cheap food, because it is essential in keeping wages down and to ensure social stability. Industrial agro-fuels and value-added agriculture may solve profitability and energy scarcity problems in the short-run, for political-economic elites and consumers with relatively high purchasing power, but it has been suggested that unless the need for low-carbon bio-diverse agriculture is addressed, energy, climate change and food security problems

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<sup>65</sup> McMichael, "A Food Regime Analysis," (2009), 286.

<sup>66</sup> Harvey (2003), 145 and 148.

<sup>67</sup> Philip McMichael, "Food Sovereignty, Social Reproduction and the Agrarian Question," in *Peasants and Globalization: Political Economy, Rural Transformation and the Agrarian Question.*, ed. A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi and C. Kay (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 304.

cannot be solved.<sup>68</sup> In addition, the acceleration of the incorporation of nature into the production process (capitalisation of nature), which intensifies the drive towards further geographical expansion, cannot go on forever as global space is "asymptotic and finite".<sup>69</sup>

Despite all these fundamental problems and contradictions, it can also be argued that there are still natural resources in many areas of the world which can be exploited in the foreseeable future. Examples include a previously closed society such as Burma. There are also many makeshift short and medium-run solutions to ensure the continuity of capital accumulation. This includes financial speculations on agri-food commodities, as well as many institutions and regulatory mechanisms upheld by states and international institutions, that continue to aid capital accumulations in different ways. As chapters 3 and 4 will discuss, the Thai state implements many rural populist policies which enable small-scale farmers to accumulate debts without addressing production problems, and also exacerbate structural socio-ecological problems of the agri-food system. Governments also sometimes use food security concerns to subsidise agri-businesses. Food price hikes of 2007/2008 exhibited problems and contradictions of the agri-food system, and yet monopoly agri-businesses managed to be profitable. Profits of the top three grain traders (Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland, Bunge) rose 103 percent, while profits those of the top three global seeds and pesticides companies (Monsanto, Syngenta and Dupont) rose 91 percent.<sup>70</sup>

One can argue that the general public, seeing such ecological and social problems embedded in the current agri-food system, is likely to pressure their

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<sup>68</sup> McMichael (2012), 697.

<sup>69</sup> Moore (2011), 27.

<sup>70</sup> GRAIN, *Making a Killing from Hunger*, 28 April 2008, 4.



governments and other institutions to make some reforms or to implement drastic changes. The problems are that there are many obstacles which prevent this from happening, not to mention that people may not notice structural problems of the current agri-food system. Utilising the insights and the concept of hegemony from Gramscian perspectives, the following part discusses how hegemonic governance structures, as well as discourses and ideas, can be used to maintain the status quo. Part 4 also uses the concepts of counter-hegemony and war of position to discuss how social and political forces may influence the capitalist agri-food system. Moreover, this part suggests that positive radical fundamental changes or transformations should be understood more as continual struggles over long periods, rather than as sudden transformations of the system brought about by "crises".

#### **Part 4: Hegemony and counter-hegemony in the agri-food system**

The previous part has discussed how agriculture and food fit into capital accumulation dynamics. However, to understand capitalist organisation of agriculture, it is insufficient to look solely through the lens of capital accumulation, as one should also look at "political spaces that constitute its oppositions" which, for example, determines the existence and size of the reserve army of labour.<sup>71</sup> In addition, even though the thesis understands the corporate agri-food system as a global system with interlinkages that account for certain similar tendencies across countries, it tries to guard against overgeneralisations across different regions, countries and local contexts. In other words, the thesis adopts a historical view which

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<sup>71</sup> McMichael (2006), 412-413.

calls for the conceptualisation of social phenomena as local-global processes within a specified historical context.<sup>72</sup>

This part of the chapter tries to address these issues through Gramscian theoretical perspectives. The thesis utilises Gramscian concepts of hegemony, counter-hegemony and co-optation of oppositions, in combination with the neo-Marxist critique of the current agri-food system, as an overarching framework to understand forces that shape the agri-food system. Section 4.1 frames ideas, production-distribution practices, and governance structures of the capitalist agri-food system as part of the hegemonic structures. It starts with a discussion of the concept of hegemony, its inter-scalar articulation, and hegemony in the context of the agri-food system that is used in this thesis. Section 4.2 then discusses counter-hegemony in the agri-food system. It also provides a brief overview of counter-hegemonic social movements in the agri-food system in Thailand, which will be discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Section 4.3 discusses the concept of co-optation of oppositions and examples of neo-liberal co-optation attempts in the agri-food system in recent years. Section 4.4 then discusses grey areas between counter-hegemony and co-optation of oppositions.

#### ***4.1) Hegemony in the agri-food system***

From a Gramscian perspective, there is no simple dichotomy divide between the "economic structure" and the "ideological superstructure". While the economic structure may set certain limits, so-called "superstructural" factors have a degree of

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<sup>72</sup> For example: E. Archetti and S. Aass, "Peasant Studies: An Overview," in *International Perspectives in Rural Sociology*, (1987); McMichael, "Incorporating Comparison Within a World-Historical Perspective," (1990); Tomich, *Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World Economy, 1830-1848*, (1990); McMichael and Buttell, "New Directions in the Political Economy of Agriculture," (1990), quoted in A. Araghi, "Global Depeasantization, 1945-1990," *Atlantic* 36, no. 2 (1995), 337.

autonomy.<sup>73</sup> Aside from government apparatus and direct coercion, civil society consisting of private organisations such as schools, churches, clubs and the media, is another channel which can be used by the ruling class to establish “hegemony,”<sup>74</sup> which can be defined as:<sup>75</sup>

“an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations”.

Hegemony occurs when a leading class transcends its particular economic interests and is capable of binding and cohering diverse aspirations and general interests of various social forces.<sup>76</sup> It can be seen as an important tool which the ruling class uses to establish “political leadership based on the consent of the led...secured by the diffusion and popularisation of the world view of the ruling class”.<sup>77</sup> It is a method of control which helps to maintain the status quo and current social relations of production.

Hegemony could manifest itself as an international phenomenon through the outward expansion on a world scale of a particular mode of production,<sup>78</sup> such as the neo-liberal capitalist order promoted by political-economic elites in the US and other

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<sup>73</sup> Adam David Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 96.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas R. Bates, “Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony,” *Journal of History of Ideas* 36, no. 2 (1975), 352-353; Adam David Morton, “Social Forces in the Struggle over Hegemony Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Political Economy,” in *Rethinking Gramsci*, ed. Marcus E. Green, 1st ed. (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 152-153.

<sup>75</sup> G.A. Williams, “Gramsci’s Concept of Egemonia,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21, no. 4 (1960), 587, quoted in Ralph Miliband, *State in Capitalist Society* (London: Quartet Books, 1969), 162.

<sup>76</sup> Morton (2011), 153.

<sup>77</sup> Bates (1975), 352.

<sup>78</sup> Morton (2007), 99.

advance capitalist countries. Since the 1970s, there has been an increasing internationalisation of production and finance driven by a “transnational managerial class”.<sup>79</sup> Aside from transnational companies, other elements of productive capital, including small and medium-sized businesses as well as elements of financial capital involved in banking and insurance, have been supportive of the internationalisation of production.<sup>80</sup> Global governance bodies or the “axis of influence” consisting of institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the G-7, have also ensured the ideological osmosis and dissemination of neo-liberal policies to state agencies.<sup>81</sup> The role of the state is still significant despite the rising structural power of transnational capital which supported common perspectives or an “emulative uniformity”, between business, state officials and representatives of international organisations, favouring the logic of capitalist market relations.<sup>82</sup> Neo-liberal capitalist hegemony has been articulated in different ways in specific national and regional contexts, through a variety of political, social and cultural agents.<sup>83</sup> In other words, neo-liberal interests of transnational social forces of capital can be internalised into different national forms of state.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Cox (1981), 147.

<sup>80</sup> Cox, *Production, Power and World Order*, (1987); Gill, “Globalisation, Market Civilisation and Disciplinary Neoliberalism,” (1995); Gill and Law, “Global Hegemony and the Structural Power of Capital,” (1989), quoted in Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, “A Critical Theory Route to Hegemony, World Order and Historical Change Neo-Gramscian. Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Relations,” in *Global Restructuring, State, Capital and Labour. Contesting Neo-Gramscian Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 18.

<sup>81</sup> Robert W. Cox, “Global Perestroika,” in *The Socialist Register: New World Order?*, ed. R. Miliband and L. Panitch (London: Merlin Press, 1992), 31, quoted in Morton (2011), 158.

<sup>82</sup> Cox (1987), 298; Gill (1995), 400–1; Gill and Law (1989), 484, quoted in Bieler and Morton, “A Critical Theory Route,” (2006), 18.

<sup>83</sup> Owen Worth, “Beyond World Order and Transnational Classes. The (re)application of Gramsci in Global Politics,” in *Gramsci and Global Politics. Hegemony and Resistance*, ed. Mark McNally and John Schwarzmantel (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 29.

<sup>84</sup> Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, “Class Formation, Resistance and the Transnational Beyond Unthinking Materialism,” in *Global Restructuring, State, Capital and Labour. Contesting Neo-Gramscian Perspectives*, ed. Andreas Bieler et al. (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 197.

In the context of the capitalist agri-food system in this thesis, hegemony refers to mainstream capitalist agri-food production-distribution practices, corresponding ideas and discourses, as well as social superstructures or governance structures which support the continuation of the status quo. Hegemonic ideas in the corporate agri-food system include neo-classical and neo-liberal ideas and assumptions regarding agriculture and food previously discussed in part 2, which justify the current corporate agri-food system and support its continuation. For example, the belief that free market, trade and investment, as well as corporate domination over agri-food systems, yield the most efficient and best outcomes for producers and consumers.

Similar to many countries around the world, Thailand's agri-food system has been shaped by such neo-liberal visions, but the Thai agri-food system also has its own local characteristics. For example, chapter 3 will discuss how neo-classical economic and neo-liberal ideologies, modernisation development world views, hierarchical patron-client mentality and other ideas, combined to help maintain the hegemonic status quo in the agri-food system in Thailand. The state, agri-businesses, universities and other political-economic elite groups in Thai society, play important roles in promoting and sustaining the hegemonic corporate agri-food system. Ideational and practical hegemony in the agri-food system, however, is not unproblematically imposed in a top-down manner on Thai society. As chapters 4 to 6 will discuss, there are many contestations that also helped to shape the agri-food system in Thailand.

The concept of hegemony in this thesis suggests that to transform the hegemonic agri-food system towards more ecologically and socially sustainable

paths, one should comprehensively challenge and develop alternatives to hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices, as well as governance structures. Governance structures in this thesis refers to both formal (such as the law) and informal (such as social relations) governance structures. The Gramscian concept of counter-hegemony is elaborated in the next section.

#### **4.2) Counter-hegemony**

From a Gramscian perspective, progressive social change will not happen automatically after a certain stage of economic development, but can only be produced by historically situated social agents, whose actions are both enabled and constrained by their social self-understandings.<sup>85</sup> Hegemony is constantly being constructed and contested, and is never a static reflection of an alliance of social class forces.<sup>86</sup> To build up "counter-hegemony", it is insufficient to try to implement progressive social changes by taking over state power (war of maneuver), as one must also engage in what Gramsci called the "war of position", which refers to the diffusion and mass acceptance of radical ideas about humans and society,<sup>87</sup> or the building up of alternative ideas and values. In other words, there is room to contest hegemony, as existing hegemonic structures are unstable product of a continuous process of a war of position.<sup>88</sup> The level of difficulty of a war of position is determined by historical development of dominant thoughts within each nation, or the "ideological terrain" which ideological struggles are likely to move. This historical form of popular thinking forms people's "commonsense" which constitutes

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<sup>85</sup> Mark Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization: Contending Visions of a New World Order* (London: Routledge, 2000), 11.

<sup>86</sup> Morton (2007), 97.

<sup>87</sup> Joseph Femia, "Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci," *Political Studies* 23, no. 1 (2006), 34.

<sup>88</sup> Rupert (2000), 11-12.

the realm of practical thinking for the masses of the people.<sup>89</sup> It is an amalgam of historically effective ideologies, scientific doctrines, and social mythologies, which can be fragmentary and contradictory, open to multiple interpretations, and hence potentially supportive of very different kinds of social visions and political projects.<sup>90</sup>

In the context of the agri-food system in this thesis, counter-hegemony consists of ideas, production-distribution practices, and governance structures which challenge and provide socio-ecologically sustainable alternatives to the hegemonic agri-food system. In Thailand, it seems like "commonsense" to believe in the superiority of large-scale high-technologies promoted by transnational agri-businesses, or to see increased large-scale corporate control over the agri-food system as "modern" and hence desirable. As the following chapter will discuss in greater detail, there are traditional cultural norms such as the "Sakdina" or patron-client attitudes that might obstruct the building up of counter-hegemony. On the other hand, as chapters 4 to 6 will discuss, there are also other cultural and religious beliefs which aid the construction of counter-hegemonic ideas and practices. For example, Buddhist values such as moderation and self-reliance, as well as appeals to traditional wisdom and idealised versions of rural Thai community filled with generosity, are used by some people to construct counter-hegemonic ideas and practices. However, such construction is not without its problems and contradictions, as chapters 4 to 6 will discuss.

Through a reading of Gramscian perspectives combined with field research, this thesis recognises the need for counter-hegemonic movements to balance

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<sup>89</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology-Marxism Without Guarantees," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986), 42.

<sup>90</sup> Rupert (2000), 11-12.

between transnational and domestic dimensions, and to understand the plurality and heterogeneity of contemporary social movements. On the one hand, with the transnationalisation of production and finance as well as of neo-liberalism, class struggle is now taking place not only between capital and labour at the national level, but also potentially at an international level.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, hegemony at the local and national levels should also be addressed. To influence state policies and other national governance structures, counter-hegemonic movements ought to understand historical, socio-economic and cultural specificities at the local and national levels. Gramsci mentions a role for "organic intellectuals" who can help form hegemonic or counter-hegemonic projects. By propagating certain ideas, intellectuals can perform a valuable supporting role in counter-hegemonic movements.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, inclinations toward elitist cosmopolitanism among intellectuals should be curbed, and counter-hegemonic projects should consider "national-popular" strategies which have relevance to the socio-economic needs and cultural demands of the common people.<sup>93</sup> Social movements should also be careful not to employ highly globalised and abstract ideological discourse that lack cultural specificity, or ignore possible benefits of mobilising popular forces at a national level, using unique and particular socio-economic and cultural demands. Failure to do so could increase gaps between intellectual elites in the movements who are likely to be more global in their outlook, and the masses who might be embedded in national-popular ideological contexts.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Bieler and Morton, "Class Formation," (2006), 198-199.

<sup>92</sup> Morton (2007), 92.

<sup>93</sup> Mark McNally, "Gramsci's Internationalism, the National-Popular and the Alternative Globalisation Movement," in *Gramsci and Global Politics. Hegemony and Resistance*, ed. Mark McNally and John Schwarzmantel (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 62.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 68-70.



Chapters 4 to 6 will discuss the role of Thai organic intellectuals that help to shape counter-hegemonic movements' ideas, strategies and actions, as well as how both sustainable agriculture and land reform movements are influenced by a combination of local, national, regional and international forces. For example, the sustainable agriculture movement is influenced by organic and fair trade movements, principles of natural farming from Japan, as well as Thai localism, while the land reform movement is influenced by landless movements in Latin America, food sovereignty, as well as the "complexity of rights" concept of Anan Ganjanapan from Chiang Mai University, Thailand. Despite having similar ideas, goals and practices, the fact that different groups of people in the movements use different terms and discourses (transnational and local terms) can sometimes be problematic. On the one hand, the movements are able to draw attention and support from different groups of people, but on the other hand, some modern-minded people are alienated from the uses of what they see as "traditional" and "conservative" terms. Chapters 5 and 6 will discuss this issue in greater detail.

When speaking of social movements which try to reform the agri-food system, one may tend to focus only on rural agrarian social movements which have farmers as the majority of members. Alternatively, Marxist perspectives often discuss potentials for social changes arising from conflicts between labour and capital, assuming that small-scale farmers will eventually become part of proletarian labour. Such views may perhaps be counter-productive, given complex urban-rural linkages and potentials of small-scale agro-ecological farms. In addition, problems in the agri-food system do not only concern farmers but everyone in the society; as consumers and as bearers of negative socio-ecological consequences. Field research in Thailand also suggests that there are benefits to building alliances across political-

economic and social groups/classes. Hence, a better approach to understand contemporary counter-hegemonic movements in the agri-food system is through the concept of the "postmodern Prince" coined by Stephen Gill. It refers to a set of (postmodern) conditions, particularly political, material, and ecological, that are giving rise to new forms of political agency with the quest to ensure human and intergenerational security on and for the planet, as well as democratic human development and human rights.<sup>95</sup> The postmodern Prince as a political agency is plural and differentiated, without institutionalised and centralised structure of representation. While many movements may appear local in nature, there is broad recognition that local problems also require global solutions.<sup>96</sup> Within a country such as Thailand, different agencies which may not be formally organised but are united by common goals, can be seen as part of a social movement in the postmodern Prince sense.

In sum, this thesis aims to explore the complex local, national and global linkages of the agri-food system, as well as accept the plurality and heterogeneity within social movements in Thailand, instead of looking only at the conflicts between labour and capital or peasant and capital. The following chapters will, nevertheless, discuss possible limitations of such plural and differentiated movements. For example, chapter 5 will discuss different approaches on organic, fair trade, local and green markets in Thailand that may lead to "co-optation of oppositions". Overall, chapters 4 to 6 suggest that counter-hegemonic movements in the agri-food system in Thailand have influenced the agri-food system to certain extents, but they are still far from bringing about structural transformations.

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<sup>95</sup> Stephen Gill, "Toward a Postmodern Prince? The Battle in Seattle as a Moment in the New Politics of Globalisation," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 1 (January 01, 2000), 131.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 137-140.

#### ***4.3) Co-optation of oppositions and short-term fixes***

One problem in the building up of counter-hegemony is that of "co-optation of oppositions" or "trasformismo". The term refers to a deliberate strategy to prevent popular participation and systemic change within the policies and procedures of political institutions through ideational distortion. This can be done through the incorporation of rhetorics of radical changes and counter-hegemony into part of the hegemonic project, without changing the hegemonic substance. Another method of co-optation is to include counter-hegemonic leaders and organisations in the decision making process, or integrate them into hegemonic institutions but without allowing them to affect the status quo. Such co-optation methods give impressions that hegemonic institutions have now taken into account concerns of counter-hegemonic groups, and that mobilisation is no longer necessary. Hence, it can decapitate popular protests for a very long time because it is difficult to mobilise the public again around the same issues.<sup>97</sup>

Re-assertions and intensifications of mainstream capitalist ways of managing the agri-food system, as well as implementations of various "reform" measures that are compatible with neo-liberal ideology, can be seen as possible co-optation of oppositions. The World Bank's development report (2008) is a good example, as it tries to portray that the agenda is to help small-scale farmers, even though in essence the report prescribes policies which advance neo-liberal and corporate agenda.<sup>98</sup> Transnational agri-business giants, such as Monsanto, have constructed the image of "pro-poor" GM seeds to justify their investments in biotechnology, as well as to

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<sup>97</sup> Bill Paterson, "Trasformismo at the World Trade Organization," in *Gramsci and Global Politics. Hegemony and Resistance*, ed. Mark McNally and John Schwarzmantel (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 47.

<sup>98</sup> Amanor (2009), 247 and 257-258.

attract financial and political support.<sup>99</sup> Another example is the Gates foundation, which has influenced world views and working agendas of many humanitarian international NGOs, research institutions, and the media through providing them with funding.<sup>100</sup>

There are some who support corporate-led measures to address problems of the current agri-food system, as well as other short-term fixes that may provide short-term reliefs but not structural reforms. Such measures can often be seen as co-optation of oppositions. Examples include: voluntary corporate responsibility mechanisms;<sup>101</sup> industry-dominated certifications for sustainable soy, palm oil and agro-fuels;<sup>102</sup> the corporate mainstreaming faction of fair trade and of organic products;<sup>103</sup> as well as the World Bank, FAO, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)'s principles for responsible land investment.<sup>104</sup> It is doubtful that corporations would take the principles for responsible land investment into account alongside owners and shareholders' interests.<sup>105</sup> In addition, investors and governments in host countries have incentives to shield the deals from outside scrutiny, and voluntary guidelines may come to serve as checklists to legitimise land

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<sup>99</sup> Behrooz Morvaridi, "Capitalist Philanthropy and Hegemonic Partnerships," *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 7 (August 2012), 1205.

<sup>100</sup> Holt Gimenez and Shattuck (2011), 122 and Morvaridi (2012), 1201-1203.

<sup>101</sup> Holt Gimenez and Shattuck (2011), 115.

<sup>102</sup> Annie Shattuck, "Will Sustainability Certifications Work? A Look at the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels," in *Agrofuels in the Americas*, ed. R. Jonasse (Oakland: Food First Books, 2009), 75-95, quoted in Holt Gimenez and Shattuck (2011), 122.

<sup>103</sup> Holt Gimenez and Shattuck (2011), 122.

<sup>104</sup> World Bank, UNCTAD, FAO, IFAD, *Principles of Responsible Agricultural Investments* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2010), quoted in White et al. (2012), 636.

<sup>105</sup> Saturnino M. Borras and Jennifer C. Franco, "From Threat to Opportunity? Problems with the Idea of a 'Code of Conduct' for Land-Grabbing," *Yale Human Rights and Development Law Journal* 13, no. 2 (2010): 507-523, quoted in White et al. (2012), 637.

grabs.<sup>106</sup> The next section also discusses how boundaries between counter-hegemony and co-optation of oppositions are not always clear.

#### ***4.4) Counter-hegemony or co-optation of oppositions?***

Harriet Friedmann uses the term "corporate-environmental food regime" or "green capitalism" to refer to the corporatisation of fair trade and organic niche markets, which can be seen as responses to pressures by social movements to address socio-ecological problems of the mainstream agri-food system. It has been noted that concerns over food quality and safety, as well as environmental effects of industrial farming, have inspired rapid growth of organic and fair trade food. On the one hand, such "green capitalism" can be seen as co-optation of oppositions; green capitalism might benefit certain privileged consumers, but it might also hinder emerging alternative agri-food systems.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, depending on contexts, one might be able to look at market-led initiatives such as fair trade and organic markets as having counter-hegemonic potentials, or as stepping stones to transform the mainstream agri-food system in the long run. The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of the debate regarding the potential transformative power of green niche markets, such organic and fair trade markets. This discussion is related to section 5.1 in the following part of the chapter, which discusses poststructuralist interest in counter-hegemonic potentials of value-creation and the consumption side of agri-food chains.

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<sup>106</sup> De Schutter, "How Not to Think of Land-Grabbing," (2011), 274-275.

<sup>107</sup> Harriet Friedmann, "From Colonialism to Green Capitalism: Social Movements and Emergence of Food Regimes," in *New Directions in the Sociology of Global Development: Research in Rural Sociology and Development Volume 11*, ed. F. Buttel and P. McMichael (Oxford: Elsevier, 2005), 230-231, 257.

Some people welcome increased involvements of large agri-businesses in the organic market, because they think it will allow organic products to reach a greater number of consumers. However, some people consider it as a hijacking of organic agriculture.<sup>108</sup> Another perspective suggests that corporate organic can co-exist with smaller-scale producers.<sup>109</sup> Co-existence may be possible in the short to medium run, but under the current market system, large-scale producers who can capture higher benefits of economies of scales tend to triumph over smaller-scale producers. The way highly capitalised agri-businesses/farms could out-compete existing organic producers by adopting industrial methods that play upon scale economies, is referred to as "conventionalisation" in organic markets.<sup>110</sup> A good example to demonstrate this problem is in California, USA. A study in 2001 suggests that 52 percent of sales in the California organic sector was accrued to 1.8 percent of growers, which indicates a polarised industry structure where a handful of large firms capture most of the revenue, while a large number of smaller-scale firms capture relatively little.<sup>111</sup> Aside from direct economic competitions, there are also threats of lower organic standards to accommodate profit-centered agri-businesses.<sup>112</sup> If organic regulations focus only on having "organic inputs" or allowing "cookie-cutter" organic practices, instead of looking at social and ecological dimensions of the production process as a whole, they are likely to encourage more entrants by agri-

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<sup>108</sup> For example: Daniel Buck, Christina Getz, and Julie Guthman, "From Farm to Table: The Organic Vegetable Commodity Chain of Northern California," *Sociologia Ruralis* 37, no. 1 (1997): 3–20.

<sup>109</sup> For example: Brad Coombes and Hugh Campbell, "Dependent Reproduction of Alternative Modes of Agriculture: Organic Farming in New Zealand," *Sociologia Ruralis* 38, no. 2 (1998): 127–145, quoted in Lyons et al. (2004), 116–118.

<sup>110</sup> Kristen Lyons et al., "Contrasting Paths of Corporate Greening in Antipodean Agriculture: Organics and Green Production," in *Agribusiness and Society. Corporate Responses to Environmentalism, Market Opportunities and Public Regulation*, ed. Kees Jansen and Sietze Vellema (London: Zed Books, 2004), 120.

<sup>111</sup> K. Klonsky et al., *Statistical Review of California's Organic Agriculture 1995-1998* (Davis: University of California, Agricultural Issues Center, 2001), quoted in Lyons et al. (2004), 124–125.

<sup>112</sup> T. Clunies-Ross, "Organic Food: Swimming Against the Tide?," in *Political, Social and Economic Perspectives on the International Food System*, ed. T. Marsden and J. Little (Aldershot: Avebury, 1990), 200–214, quoted in Lyons et al. (2004), 118.

businesses.<sup>113</sup> For example, studies suggest that agri-businesses in California tend to practice a shallower form of agro-ecology based on input substitutions, industrial-scale plantings of single crops, and contract farming.<sup>114</sup> This issue is also being discussed in Thailand, as chapter 5 will discuss in greater detail.

Similarly, literature on fair trade and local markets suggest that there are some benefits to such initiatives, but they are not without their problems. On the one hand, there are many studies which support local and fair trade markets as means to redistribute income to marginalised individuals.<sup>115</sup> For example, it is argued that fair trade shortens social distance between consumers and producers, creating networks based on trusts and fairness on a world-scale.<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, there are some studies which suggest that niche markets based on certified agricultural products might price out a majority of consumers and producers,<sup>117</sup> thereby exacerbate socio-economic inequalities at the point of production and undermine existing social norms.<sup>118</sup> Another critique is that fair trade is not that different from conventional businesses which use advertisements to add values to their products. For example, despite having an ethical image, a case study of fair trade shea butter produced by women in Burkina Faso suggests that female shea butter producers purchase shea

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<sup>113</sup> For example: Peter M. Rosset and Miguel A. Altieri, "Agroecology Versus Input Substitution," (1997); Julie Guthman, "Regulating Meaning, Appropriating Nature," (1998).

<sup>114</sup> For example: Julie Guthman, "Raising Organic: An Agro-Ecological Assessment of Grower Practices in California" (2000): 257–266.

<sup>115</sup> For example: Michael K. Goodman, "Reading Fair Trade: Political Ecological Imaginary and the Moral Economy of Fair Trade Foods," (September 2004); Margaret Levi and April Linton, "Fair Trade: A Cup at a Time?," (September 01, 2003), quoted in Niles and Roff (2008), 6.

<sup>116</sup> Laura T. Reynolds, "Consumer/Producer Links in Fair Trade Coffee Networks," *Sociologia Ruralis* 42, no. 4 (October 2002), 419–420.

<sup>117</sup> For example: Stewart Lockie, "The Invisible Mouth: Mobilizing 'the Consumer' in Food Production-Consumption Networks," *Sociologia Ruralis* 42, no. 4 (2002): 278–294; Robin Jane Roff, "Shopping for Change? Neoliberalizing Activism and the Limits to Eating Non-GMO," *Agriculture and Human Values* 24, no. 4 (August 08, 2007): 511–522.

<sup>118</sup> For example: S. Freidberg, *The Contradictions of Clean: Supermarket Ethical Trade and African Horticulture* (London, 2003) and Christina Getz and A. Shreck, "What Organic and Fair Trade Labels Do Not Tell Us: Towards a Place-Based Understanding of Certification," *Journal of Consumer Studies* 30, no. 5 (2006): 490–501, quoted in Niles and Roff (2008), 6.

nuts from female nut collectors at cut-throat prices to turn a slight profit on their own butter production enterprise.<sup>119</sup> As for local markets, such as farmers market and community supported agriculture (CSA), power and privilege sometimes rest more with educated, middle class consumers than with farmers and less-advantaged consumers. For example, if share prices of CSA are considered too high, current members may not return the following seasons, while new members are difficult to recruit.<sup>120</sup>

Chapter 5 will discuss how such alternative green market channels are still developing in Thailand, and that despite benefits to producers and consumers, there is room for improvement. The thesis will also argue that even though market-led initiatives may appear to provide only short to medium term fixes, they could bear seeds of counter-hegemonic transformations. Farmers market, CSA, organic and fair trade market channels can be used to bridge gaps between producers and consumers, and raise awareness about structural ecological, social and political-economic problems of the agri-food system, which may then transform into counter-hegemonic ideological and practical forces. Poststructuralist perspectives, to be discussed in the next part of the chapter, also suggest that such producer-consumer movements have political-economic power to influence and reform the mainstream corporate agri-food system.

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<sup>119</sup> Marlène Elias and Magalie Saussey, “‘The Gift That Keeps on Giving’: Unveiling the Paradoxes of Fair Trade Shea Butter,” *Sociologia Ruralis* 53, no. 2 (April 01, 2013), 159 and 173.

<sup>120</sup> For example, see: Clare Hinrichs, “Embeddedness and Local Food Systems: Notes on Two Types of Direct Agricultural Market,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 16 (2000): 295-303; C.A. Cone and A. Kakaliouras, “Community Supported Agriculture: Building Moral Community or an Alternative Consumer Choice,” *Culture and Agriculture* 51/52 (1995): 28–31.



## **Part 5: Insights from other theoretical perspectives**

In the construction of an alternative theoretical approach to that of the neo-classical economics approach, this chapter relies mainly on neo-Marxist and Gramscian perspectives. However, it has kept in mind possible critiques of such theoretical perspectives, as well as other insights from poststructuralist and feminist perspectives. Section 5.1 discusses poststructuralist critiques of Marxism's structuralist and production-centric tendencies, as well as some main concerns regarding the importance of values and the sphere of consumption. It also argues that the Gramscian approach addresses these concerns. Section 5.2 then discusses other concerns raised by feminist/gender perspectives, particularly regarding structural oppression based on gender and the role of non-commodified work in the agri-food system.

### **5.1) Poststructuralism**

Influenced by poststructuralism, the field of sociological agri-food studies made what is often called "a consumption turn".<sup>121</sup> By the late 1990s, there are many studies which try to pay more attention to a wider range of actors in the agri-food system. For example, many studies explore the power and influence of retailers and consumers in agri-food chains, and creations of alternative values and knowledge in fair trade and organic agri-food network.<sup>122</sup> The thesis uses some of these studies to

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<sup>121</sup> For example: David Goodman and E. Melanie DuPuis, "Knowing Food and Growing Food: Beyond the Production-Consumption Debate in the Sociology of Agriculture," *Sociologia Ruralis* 42, no. 1 (January 2002): 5–22; T. K. Marsden and A. Arce, "Constructing Quality: Emerging Food Networks in the Rural Transition," *Environment and Planning* 27, no. 8 (1995): 1261–1279.

<sup>122</sup> For example: Raynolds (2002); Stewart Lockie et al., "Eating 'Green': Motivations Behind Organic Food Consumption in Australia," *Sociologia Ruralis* 42, no. 1 (2010): 23–40; A. Arce and T. K. Marsden, "The Social Construction of International Food: A New Research Agenda," *Economic Geography* 69, no. 3 (1993): 293–311.

explore hegemony and counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand in chapters 4 and 5.

From a poststructuralist view point, Marxist perspectives tend to see production and labour as the privileged loci of politics and social change, while consumption is seen as private, atomic and passive.<sup>123</sup> A Marxist analysis would suggest that what seems "political" in the realm of consumption is just bourgeois ideology. For example, when upper income consumers buy products from niche markets, the act of buying gives an appearance of emancipation even though it is still implicated with capitalism.<sup>124</sup> Such view can be criticised using poststructuralist studies which suggest that knowledge and discourse can be linked to the political and material world. For example, struggles over definitions and certifications of organic food have political-economic consequences on organic production-consumption networks.<sup>125</sup> In sum, constructions of values and knowledge in alternative production-consumption networks, which contest normally accepted productionist values in mainstream agri-food networks, may bear "the seeds of a political struggle" that could lead to broader producer-consumer and/or political alliances.<sup>126</sup>

The critique of Marxism's production-centered approach is useful as a reminder not to be too narrow-minded and "privilege the agency and power of either producers or consumers".<sup>127</sup> This thesis values the viewpoint that struggles in the realm of ideas, values and knowledge, can have political implications. However, it

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<sup>123</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 31, quoted in Goodman and DuPuis (2002), 9.

<sup>124</sup> Goodman and DuPuis (2002), 6-9.

<sup>125</sup> See Guthman, "Raising Organic," (2000).

<sup>126</sup> Goodman and DuPuis (2002), 17.

<sup>127</sup> S. Lockie and L. Collie., "'Feed the Man Meat': Gendered Food and Theories of Consumption," in *Restructuring Global and Regional Agricultures: Transformations in Australasian Agri-Food Economies and Spaces*, ed. D. Burch, J. Cross, and G. Lawrence (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1999), 270, quoted in Goodman and DuPuis (2002), 15.

frames the issues differently, using Gramscian concepts such as counter-hegemonic ideas and war of position, in combination with a neo-Marxist analysis of the hegemonic corporate agri-food system. This is to guard against a generalisation that all kinds of supposedly "alternative" values and knowledge in "alternative" agri-food networks hold seeds of structural emancipatory transformations. In other words, structural analysis serves as a benchmark to evaluate these alternative ideas and practices; to see if they may be able to influence and transform the hegemonic system towards more socially and ecologically sustainable directions. As discussed in section 4.4, one has to look carefully at both ideas and practices in these alternative agri-food networks to guard against co-optation of oppositions. Some participants may utilise rhetorics of "alternative" ideas and values, while in reality, their actions may not deviate from the mainstream. Chapter 5 will discuss in greater detail how producer-consumer networks are important to counter-hegemonic projects of the sustainable agriculture movement in Thailand.

## ***5.2) Feminist/gender perspectives***

There are some feminist/gender studies which indicate that women are often in disadvantaged positions in the agri-food system compare to men.<sup>128</sup> For example, women labour in agricultural production is often central and yet invisible (not acknowledged),<sup>129</sup> not to mention that women have unequal access to land compare to men in many places of the world.<sup>130</sup> Women also have constrained access to non-

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<sup>128</sup> Patricia Allen and Carolyn Sachs, "Women and Food Chains: The Gendered Politics of Food," *International Journal of Sociology of Food and Agriculture* 15, no. 1 (2007), 4; Deborah Barndt, *Women Working the NAFTA Food Chain: Women, Food and Globalization* (Toronto, ON: Sumach Press, 1999); Catherine Dolan, "On Farm and Packhouse: Employment at the Bottom of a Global Value Chain," *Rural Sociology* 69, no. 1 (2004): 99–126.

<sup>129</sup> Allen and Sachs (2007), 5.

<sup>130</sup> Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); S. Lastarria-Cornhiel, "Impact of Privatization on Gender and Property Rights in Africa," *World Development* 25, no. 8 (1997): 1317–1333; Shahra Razavi,

land resources such as agricultural production inputs, credit and extension services,<sup>131</sup> while the effects of many neo-liberal and agricultural modernisation policies have harsher consequences for women in the agri-food sector.<sup>132</sup> There are also empirical studies which suggest that women use their access to agricultural resources to improve household agricultural productivity and food security, as well as children's health and nutrition.<sup>133</sup> In addition, women might be motivated to social and political action differently than men regarding environmental problems and crises.<sup>134</sup>

These gendered differences in knowledge of the environment, access, and activism, should be seen as "products of socially and culturally created structural positions", rather than something which is inherently biological.<sup>135</sup> This thesis recognises that more gendered research on the agri-food system is needed, and although it focuses its study at the macro level using a neo-Marxist and Gramscian approach, there is room to integrate gendered perspectives into its framework through the use of feminist socialists' critique of both capitalism and patriarchy as the two sources of structural oppression,<sup>136</sup> as well as perspectives on non-commodified work. Studies have noted how rural women often face "double

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"Liberalisation and the Debates on Women's Access to Land," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 8 (December 2007): 1479–1500.

<sup>131</sup> A. Peterman, J. Behrman, and A. R. Quisumbing, *A Review of Empirical Evidence on Gender Differences in Non-Land Agricultural Inputs, Technology and Services in Developing Countries. International Food Policy Research Institute Discussion Paper 001003* (Washington DC, 2010).

<sup>132</sup> For example: Deborah Barndt, *Tangled Routes: Women, Work, and Globalization on the Tomato Trail* (UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008); Candice Shaw, "Global Agro Food Systems: Gendered and Ethnic Inequalities in Mexico's Agricultural Industry," *McGill Sociological Review* 2, April (2011), 92-93 and 103-104.

<sup>133</sup> L. C. Smith et al., *The Importance of Women's Status for Child Nutrition in Developing Countries. Research Report 131* (Washington DC, 2002); K. Saito, H. Mekonnen, and D. Spurling, *Raising the Productivity of Women Farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa. Discussion Paper 230* (Washington DC, 1994).

<sup>134</sup> Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology: a Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 64; Allen and Sachs (2012), 12-13.

<sup>135</sup> Robbins (2012), 64.

<sup>136</sup> George Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), quoted in Shaw (2011), 100.

burden", which refers to when women are responsible for domestic tasks as well as being increasingly responsible for supplying a wage to their families. Sometimes women face "triple burden" when they also have to work on family farmland for partial subsistence.<sup>137</sup> Feminist political economy also draws attention to the importance of non-commodified work, and the fluidity of the boundary between commodified and non-commodified spheres within capitalist economies. It also raises questions on how the reserve army of labour sustains itself. In Southern Africa, it has been argued that having a plot of land can be considered a form of social security against the vagaries of wage employment.<sup>138</sup> This is an important and useful perspective when discussing the continuing rural-urban linkages and semi-proletarian farmers in Thailand. As chapter 5 will discuss in greater detail, the agricultural sector/rural areas in Thailand often provide social safety nets for low and semi-skilled workers who migrated to urban area to work, as well as subsidise their costs of living e.g. through food provision and as places to raise children.

There is not much gendered studies on the agri-food system in Thailand to build on, but the thesis tries to take notice of gender differences and socially differentiated groups during field research. While not denying that there are probably some serious forms of gender inequality in Thai society and in the agri-food sector, field research in Thailand reveals that many women in the agri-food sector and counter-hegemonic movements are not barred from leadership positions, whether in the civil service, NGOs, local politics, or business enterprises. Relative to some other countries, it is not clear that women in the agri-food system in Thailand are at

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<sup>137</sup> Barndt (2008), quoted in Shaw (2011), 100.

<sup>138</sup> Bridget O'Laughlin, "Gender Justice, Land and the Agrarian Question in Southern Africa," in *Peasants and Globalization: Political Economy, Rural Transformation and the Agrarian Question*, ed. A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi and Cristobal Kay (New York: Routledge, 2009), 204-205.

strikingly disadvantaged positions, or that they have different ways of using agricultural resources compare to men. Chapters 5 and 6 will provide more detail.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed how mainstream neo-liberal ideology and neo-classical economic perspectives have influenced the development of the current mainstream agri-food system. It has outlined an alternative theoretical framework based on neo-Marxists and Gramscian perspectives, to explain how the current system is linked to capital accumulation and to expose structural social, political-economic and ecological problems. With a clear framework to explain structural problems of the current global agri-food system, one can better identify alternative values, knowledge, production-distribution practices and governance structures, that address emancipatory social and ecological concerns. Part 4 of this chapter has discussed how a reading of Gramsci and Stephen Gill's "postmodern Prince" suggests that counter-hegemonic movements are likely to benefit from balancing local, national and global goals in their strategies, and in having diverse and non-centralised agencies in their movements that share common goals. It has also discussed co-optation of opposition attempts by neo-liberal forces. Even though the theoretical framework relies mostly on neo-Marxist and Gramscian perspectives, part 5 has tried to explain how the thesis takes into account some insights from poststructuralist and feminist/gender theoretical perspectives. For example, the thesis accepts the possibility that alternative value creations in organic and fair trade niche markets could have political-economic consequences, and also tries to be gender sensitive, even though it cannot do a full-scale gendered analysis of the Thai agri-food system.

Overall, this chapter has helped to advance the third main contribution of this thesis, which is to extend neo-Marxist and Gramscian theories on the agri-food system. The following chapter will build on this chapter in its exploration of hegemonic ideas and discourses, production-distribution practices and governance structures in the agri-food system in Thailand. It will also address local, national and global linkages in the Thai agri-food system. Empirical exploration in the next chapter will also support the assertion that the neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework outlined in this chapter is relevant and appropriate to the study of the agri-food system in Thailand.

### **Chapter 3**

## **Hegemony in the Agri-Food System in Thailand**

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter has discussed the neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework used in this thesis to explore how the general tendency of capital accumulation has shaped the globalised mainstream hegemonic agri-food system. In addition, this theoretical framework suggests that the hegemonic agri-food system should be understood as being supported by economic structures as well as governance and ideological structures. The present chapter discusses the hegemonic agri-food system as it unfolded in Thailand between 1990 and 2014, and suggests that the neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework is appropriate as an analytical tool in this context. The discussion of hegemonic agri-food system in Thailand in this chapter provides a foundation to understand counter-hegemonic movements in the agri-food system in Thailand and co-optation of oppositions, which are discussed in the following chapters.

Through an in-depth engagement with empirical evidence from Thailand, this chapter advances the first main argument of this thesis, which is that the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand has been shaped by transnational and domestic forces to aid capital accumulation, and is sustained through the maintenance of hegemonic agri-food production-distribution, governance structures and ideational order. As the following parts of the chapter elaborate, hegemonic agri-food production-distribution in Thailand benefit large corporations and capital accumulation at the expense of nature, producers, and the general population. This chapter also suggests that the



continuing existence of such hegemonic agri-food production-distribution practices in Thailand is supported by many forms of governance structures and hegemonic ideas.

This chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part starts the discussion of the hegemonic agri-food system in Thailand by exploring hegemonic production-distribution practices, which is the most observable component of the agri-food system compare to hegemonic governance and ideas. Issues to be discussed include: unsustainable industrialised production methods; land grabs; the food-fuel nexus; financial speculations of agri-food commodities; and monopoly power in the agri-food sector. The second part of the chapter discusses hegemonic governance structures which facilitate the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand, with emphasis on the roles of domestic forces such as the Thai state and transnational forces such as global governance bodies. The last part of the chapter discusses the hegemonic ideational order, which is a combination of transnational neo-liberal/capitalist ideas as well as domestic historical-cultural mentality in Thailand, such as that of patron-client, which aid capital accumulation through the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand.

### **Part 1: Hegemonic agri-food production-distribution in Thailand**

This part of the chapter explains how the neo-Marxist theoretical framework, discussed in section 3.1 of the previous chapter, can appropriately be used to make sense of mainstream agri-food production-distribution in Thailand. Reflections on empirical evidence, in combination with the theoretical framework, suggest that the hegemonic capitalist agri-food production-distribution in Thailand seems to benefit large corporations and capital accumulation at the expense of nature, small and

medium farmers, as well as consumers. The following sections 1.1 to 1.4 discuss major defining components of the contemporary capitalist agri-food production-distribution practices in Thailand, which are important to capital accumulation. These interconnected components include: commodification and capitalist agri-food production; land grabs and the food-fuel nexus; cash crops and financial speculations; and agribusinesses and monopoly power. As part of the global system, hegemonic agri-food production-distribution practices in Thailand reflect many characteristics of the globalised corporate agri-food production-distribution practices that were discussed in the previous chapter.

### ***1.1) Commodification and capitalist agricultural production***

This section first discusses historical roles of transnational hegemonic forces in laying the foundations of contemporary mainstream agri-food production-distribution in Thailand, such as by encouraging exports of agri-food products to meet world market demands. The latter part of this section further discusses how the Green Revolution production paradigm in Thailand, adopted from advanced capitalist countries, is a manifestation of the hegemonic neo-classical economic world views previously discussed in part 2 of chapter 2, which disregard ecological-social externalities in the name of economic efficiency. From a neo-Marxist perspective, increased commercialisation and commodification of agri-food resources, as well as under-valuations of the production costs of agri-food products, help to establish conditions for cheap food and raw materials which aid global capital accumulation. Using empirical evidence from Thailand, this section illustrates how industrial agricultural production methods, genetically modified seeds and associated private property rights, have been instrumental in the

commodification of natural resources and agri-food products. They can also be seen as methods of accumulation by disposessions that enable exploitations of both humans and nature in service of capital accumulation. Parts 2 and 3 of this chapter continue the discussion on hegemonic transnational forces, with focuses on hegemonic governance and ideas of the agri-food system in Thailand in more recent periods.

### ***The historical role of hegemonic transnational forces***

Since the very beginning, transnational forces have encouraged the integration of Thailand into the global agri-food system and economy, as well as encouraged exports of Thai agricultural commodities to meet world market demands. Commercialisation of agricultural production accelerated following the Bowring Treaty of 1855 between Thailand and Britain. Britain, which was at that time in search for cheap rice for its colonies and raw materials, encouraged Thailand to supply rice to the international market.<sup>1</sup> After the Second World War, grains were much needed in Europe, and Thailand expanded plantations of certain commodities to meet these demands. Through the advice of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) in 1947 and loans from the World Bank in 1952, the Thai government started to invest in infrastructures, such as large-scale irrigation projects, to help transform the agricultural sector and encourage exports of agri-food products such as rice.<sup>2</sup> Around 1957 and 1958, the World Bank published a report on a public development program for Thailand, which became an important

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<sup>1</sup> Walden Bello, Shea Cunningham, and Li Kheng Pho, *A Siamese Tragedy. Development and Disintegration in Modern Thailand* (New York: Zed Books, 1998), 168.

<sup>2</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon and Suriyon Thankitchanukit, *From the Green Revolution to Bio-Engineering. Lessons for the Future of Thai Agriculture*. (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2008), 61 (in Thai) and Sayamon Kraiyoorawong et al., *Traditional Wisdom: Community and Nature's Ways* (Bangkok: Duan-tula Printing, 2008), 101. (in Thai)

influence for the first Thai National Economic and Social Development (NESD) plan in 1961. The plan outlined a nationwide transformation of agricultural production in different regions. For example, rice production was to be expanded in the Chaopraya River Delta in the Central Plain, while the production of sugar cane and other cash-crops was encouraged in the Northeast.<sup>3</sup> In the South, the spread of mono-cropping of rubber plantations was an initiative of the Thai government, but it was also encouraged by international factors such as the Korean War, which increased demands for rubber. Thailand also received international loans from the World Bank and the UK Department for International Development (formerly known as the Overseas Development Administration) to implement expansions of rubber plantations between 1978 and 1982.<sup>4</sup>

As chapter 2 section 1.1 discussed, the Green Revolution was promoted around the world after the Second World War by private institutions such as Rockefeller and Ford foundations, as well as by the US and other OECD governments. At the start of the adoption of Green Revolution technology in Thailand in 1950, the US sent two agricultural science academics to train officials and students, and to collect different rice genetic materials to be developed so that they are responsive to chemical fertilisers, with aims to meet domestic demand and international trade.<sup>5</sup> The development of hybrid maize seeds, for example, was supported by the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>6</sup> The next sub-section discusses how the Green Revolution production paradigm aids capital accumulation at the expense of nature and small-scale farmers in Thailand.

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<sup>3</sup> Sukran Rojanaprai Wong et al., *Local Genes and Sustainable Agriculture: A Document for the Third Alternative Agriculture Assembly 18-21 November 2004, Kasetsart University* (Nonthaburi: Pim-dee Printing, 2004), 46-48. (in Thai)

<sup>4</sup> Lienchamroon and Thankitchanukit (2008), 80 and 88-89.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 49-51.

<sup>6</sup> Rojanaprai Wong et al. (2004), 50-59.

### *The Green Revolution and capital accumulation*

Part 1 of chapter 2 discussed the Green Revolution production paradigm and its many ecological-social problems, such as the current agri-food production methods' unsustainable reliant on fossil fuels. This sub-section provides a brief exploration of empirical evidence in Thailand which lend support to such views. It also suggests that hegemonic economically "efficient" agricultural production methods, such as industrial-scale mono-cropping with extensive use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, help to commodify nature. In addition, Green Revolution production paradigm disregards negative social-ecological costs, which enables exploitation of both nature and humans to ensure "cheap" raw materials and food for capital accumulation's sake.

In Thailand, the Green Revolution causes soil degradation and the reduction of biodiversity (such as loss of traditional rice, fish and plant genes), toxin in soil, water and food, as well as many new plant diseases, which have negative impact on local food security.<sup>7</sup> However, these costs are not reflected in the costs of production of agri-food products, as the following paragraphs elaborate. In addition, under the current hegemonic production, yields of mono-crops are used as measures of productivity, while side effects and co-products are neglected and not seen as important even if they affect local food security, local ecologies, and potential income sources. This reflects a form of commodification of nature where agri-food products are seen in isolation as objects to be sold in markets to gain value, without considerations of how these products relate to their natural and social contexts. Intensive mono-cropping of rice and extensive use of chemicals, for example, can

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<sup>7</sup> Lienchamroon and Thankitchanukit (2008), 156.

destroy local varieties of vegetables and fish in paddy fields, which negatively affect local food security. As suggests by a field research from Lumbua, Suphanburi province, before the Green Revolution a household could catch 200 to 300 kilograms (kg.) of fish per year from their paddy fields. In early 2000s, the catch would be worth 10,000 to 15,000 baht per year. However, farmers from Lumbua reported a reduction in fish species and that they could rarely catch fish from their paddy fields due to chemical pesticides.<sup>8</sup>

High Yielding Varieties (HYV) and genetically modified (GM) seeds, which are major technological components of the Green Revolution production paradigm, can be seen as a form of commodification that gives capital more power over agriculture. These seeds may increase yields, but their prices can also be quite high under corporate monopoly control. A fieldwork study in 2008 in Kampangech and Utaraditr provinces, for example, found that hybrid rice seeds sold by Charoen Pokphand (CP) increased productivity by only 15 percent, while the costs were around 500 percent higher than local seeds. Hence, it was not economically sensible for farmers to use CP hybrid rice seeds. In addition, farmers cannot save CP hybrid rice seeds for the next round of plantation, unlike traditional open pollinated seeds, so they would have to buy rice seeds every year from the company.<sup>9</sup>

Between 1998 and 2003, the average yield of rice in Thailand was 420 kg. per rai (rai is a unit which is equal to 1,600 square metres), which was around 37.77 percent higher than before the introduction of new HYV seeds.<sup>10</sup> However, as discussed previously, there were many other costs to consider. For example, new

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-149. The field study was conducted in the early 2000s.

<sup>9</sup> BioThai, "Report on the Problems of Hybrid Rice Seeds: Case Study of Hybrid Rice Owned by the Charoen Pokphand Group," 2009, 18-20. (in Thai)

<sup>10</sup> Calculation based on FAO STAT (2004) in Lienchamroon and Thankitchanukit (2008), 114-117.

semi-dwarf rice seeds do not suit ecological realities in many areas, and they also require complementary large-scale irrigation systems.<sup>11</sup> Intensive mono-production of rice which does not allow paddy fields to rest tends to lead to environmental problems such as land degradation, which attributes to the spread of pests and the need to use increased levels of chemicals.<sup>12</sup> This tends to lead to vicious cycles, as uses of chemicals and antibiotics increase diseases and pests.<sup>13</sup> Between 1994 and 2004, annual imports of agricultural chemicals in Thailand increased fourfold, and chemicals usage increased by 13.2 percent per year per rai. However, yield per rai increased on average only 2.5 percent per year.<sup>14</sup> It has also been suggested that prices of chemical fertilisers tend to increase because they are derived from finite fossil fuels.<sup>15</sup> Average percentage increases of the prices of imported inputs per year between 2007 and 2011 were 10.36 percent for chemical fertilisers, 6.00 percent for pesticides and herbicides, and 386.42 percent for walk-behind tractors.<sup>16</sup>

Higher costs of production relative to revenues are often suggested as contributing factors that lead to debts and dispossessions of small-scale farmers in Thailand.<sup>17</sup> A study suggests that in 2009, 6 million farmers were in debt to a total

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>12</sup> Assoc. Prof. Juthatip Patrawart, Director of an academic study of co-operatives, Kasetsart University, quoted in Yupin Hongthong, “The State Pushes to Solve Farmer Crisis: Open Smart Farmers School in 6 provinces” *Bangkok Business News*, August 11, 2013 (in Thai); Kookiet Sroythong, “Pesticides Usage and the Spread of Brown Planthoppers among Rice Crops in the Central and Lower North Regions,” in *An Academic Conference to Monitor Agricultural Chemicals 1, 16-17 June 2011*, ed. National Committee to pPan for Food Security, 2011. (in Thai)

<sup>13</sup> Lienchamroon and Thankitchanukit (2008), 185-187.

<sup>14</sup> National Health Committee, *Report of the Meeting 1/2008 on the Topic of Policies and Strategies to Reduce Negative Health Effects from Chemical Pesticides on 14 January 2008* (Bangkok, 2008), quoted in Sajin Prachason, “A Draft Document for the Meeting ‘Agriculture and Food in Time of Crisis’, 22 July 2008,” in *Progress Report to the National Health Commission on Developments of Proposals from the National Health Assembly 2008*, 40. (in Thai)

<sup>15</sup> Lienchamroon and Thankitchanukit (2008), 118-120.

<sup>16</sup> Office of Agricultural Economics (Thailand), *Agricultural Economics Indicators 2011*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> This issue is discussed by many scholars and studies, such as Assoc. Prof. Juthatip Patrawart, Kasetsart University, quoted in Hongthong, “The State Pushes to Solve Farmer Crisis,” (2013) and Pattama Sittichai and et al., *A Complete Report on the Project to Compile and Analyse the Problems*

extent of 1 billion baht and 30 per cent of these loans were non-performing loans.<sup>18</sup> Another study in 2011, based on random surveys of 1,182 samples of farmers in Thailand, found that 87.6 percent of them had debts over 100,000 baht each, while their income was significantly lower than their ability to pay back debts.<sup>19</sup> Major shares of the loans, from both formal and informal sources, were used for consumption and agricultural investments. Even though 82.2 percent of the farmers suggested they could repay formal debts, 52.8 percent could not repay their informal loans.<sup>20</sup>

There are also problems of incorrect usage of chemicals and negative consequences on health and the environment.<sup>21</sup> Between 2001 and 2010, there were over 1,000 cases of sickness from agricultural pesticides per year. Land in many areas of the country was also found to be contaminated.<sup>22</sup> A study suggests that 72 percent of farming communities experienced soil problems such as soil erosion and lack of organic compounds in 2006.<sup>23</sup> A survey in 2007 from the Ministry of Health also suggests that 38.52 percent of farmers had dangerously high level of agricultural

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*of Farmers and Sustainable Development* (Bangkok: National Economics and Social Development Board (NESDB), 2002). (in Thai)

<sup>18</sup> From Dr. Sansit Piriyaangsan's interview, at the time was the head of the Farmers' Reconstruction and Development Fund, in The Economics team's editorial, *Thairath Newspaper*, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2009. (in Thai)

<sup>19</sup> Mr. Thanawat Pholwichai, Director of the Center of Economics and Business Forecasting, University of Chamber of Commerce, quoted in *Thairath* (online), 26 May 2011. (in Thai)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Over-usage of agricultural chemicals are often attributed to incorrect usage of chemicals by farmers (this view is shared by agri-business representatives interviewed by emails, such as Songpun Kuldilokrat, Managing Director at Arysta LifeScience Co., Ltd, email correspondent date 21 January 2013 and Dr. Kriengsak Suwantharadol, Syngenta (Thailand), email correspondent date 14 March 2013), uncontrolled imports of dangerous types of chemicals and of advertising (Phuttina Nontaworakarn, "Summary of the Current Status of the Revised Dangerous Chemical Acts 2008," in *An Academic Conference to Monitor Agricultural Chemicals 1, 16-17 June 2011*, ed. National Committee to Plan for Food Security (Bangkok, 2011), 100-101. (in Thai))

<sup>22</sup> National Committee to Develop Strategic Plan to Manage Chemicals, *National Strategic Plan to Manage Chemicals 4 (2012-2021)*, (Nonthaburi: Integrated Programme for Chemical safety, Food and Drugs Administration, Ministry of Public Health, 2011), 8. (in Thai)

<sup>23</sup> Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, "Situation on State of Environment," 2006, quoted in Sajin Prachason, *Food Security in Thai Society: A Report Submitted to UNDP Thailand, January 2009* (Bangkok, 2009), 37. (in Thai)



chemicals in their bodies.<sup>24</sup> Aside from dangerous toxins in agri-food products, the general population can also be negatively affected by the current production methods through other channels, such as through haze from land clearing.<sup>25</sup>

It can be seen that the current hegemonic production paradigm has many negative environmental and health consequences, and yet Thailand is still committed to it. By externalising socio-ecological costs, the hegemonic Green Revolution production paradigm helps capital accumulation by systematically under-valuing the costs of agri-food products. Moreover, dependency on finite fossil-fuels suggests that the current mainstream agri-food system is not sustainable in the long run.

Commodification of seeds also helps capital to extract surplus or rents. Similar to the case of HYV seeds, genetically modified (GM) seeds are being portrayed in recent years as a cutting-edge technological advancement which would help solve global food security. However, as chapter 2 section 1.1 discussed, GM seeds are scientifically unproven to be higher-yielding. In addition, many studies that they have negative ecological, social and economic costs, and their use is usually coupled with strict property rights agreements which reinforce monopoly power of biotechnology agri-businesses. For example, during bilateral free trade agreement negotiations, the US usually tries to convince other states to use the same trade

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<sup>24</sup> Dr. Pibul Issarapan, Vice Deputy Director Bureau of Occupational and Environmental Diseases, Ministry of Health, "Farmers' Risks from Using Agricultural Chemicals and Sudden Illness," in *An Academic Conference to Monitor Agricultural Chemicals 1, 16-17 June 2011*, ed. National Committee to Plan for Food Security (Bangkok, 2011). 60. (in Thai)

<sup>25</sup> For example, it has been suggested that agricultural land clearing through burning, for the purpose of contract farming of maize in the Northern part of Thailand, is an important factor contributing to dangerous (above standard level) of haze during the first few months of each year, which causes various health problems for people in the Northern provinces and increases risks of lung cancer in the longer run. (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Phongthep Wiwattanadech, the Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Chiang Mai University, interviewed in Thai Publica (online), "'Phongthep Wiwattanadech', Medical Doctor at Chiang Mai University Suggests 'Contract Farming' to Be the Cause of Haze Pollution in Northern Thailand. Revealed Statistics Suggesting Peaked Dangerous Chemicals - Lung Cancer," *Thai Publica (online)*, September 01, 2012. (in Thai)

standards as the US regarding genetically modified organisms and intellectual property rights.<sup>26</sup> From a neo-Marxist perspective, such commodification and strict intellectual property rights of seeds can be seen as a form of accumulation by dispossession.

In Thailand, the leakage of Monsanto's genetically modified BT cottons outside experimental fields, discovered in 1999, led to widespread opposition from civil society against open-field experiments of GM seeds. In 2001, the Thai state agreed to halt GM's cultivation for commercial purposes, except under laboratory and greenhouse conditions.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, since then there have been contaminations of certain commodities such as papaya, maize, soya, cotton and chilli.<sup>28</sup> There have also been constant pressures, such as from some researchers and the private sector, for the Thai state to support GM research and field tests.<sup>29</sup> In addition to pushing for a bilateral Thai-US FTA in 2004 (which was never realised due to protests from civil society), US officials also tried to lobby and establish good relations with the government, civil servants, academics and newspapers in Thailand, to push for public acceptance and commercial plantations of GM seeds.<sup>30</sup> In 2007, the Thai state finally allowed open-field experiments of GM seeds under certain conditions, such as under the state's controlled land and with the state's permission. In February 2013, Monsanto started working with Naresuan University to test GM

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<sup>26</sup> Sittiphol Wiboonthanakul, *GMOs in the International Economic Governance* (Bangkok: WTO Watch project, Economic Department, Thammasart University, 2004), 59 and 79. (in Thai)

<sup>27</sup> Prachason (2009), 44 ; Natwipa Iewskul, "18 Years Track Records of GMOs: Threats to Thailand's Food Sovereignty," *Greenpeace Southeast Asia Website*, April 02, 2013. (in Thai)

<sup>28</sup> BioThai found these contaminations, quoted in Iewskul (2013) and also from tests at transgenic technology center, Science Faculty, Chulalongkorn University, quoted in Plan for Resource Base 2007-2010 and Plan to Support Food Security 2010-2013, *From Resource Base to Food Security: Restoration of Natural Resource Base and Biodiversity for Food Security in Community and Thai Society* (Co-operation between BioThai, SATHAI, Esan Man Yuen Center at Ubolratchathani province, and others), 19. (in Thai)

<sup>29</sup> Iewskul (2013).

<sup>30</sup> Interviews of relevant people in Lienchamroon and Thankitchanukit (2008), 266-269.

maize (NK603) in an open field environment, raising concerns over contaminations and other ecological effects.<sup>31</sup> Some people are also concerned that this initiative will pave way for the introduction of other GM crops such as GM rice and chili.<sup>32</sup> In addition, under strict property rights agreements that Thailand might be pressured to sign in the near future as of 2014 (free trade agreements are discussed in part 2 of this chapter), farmers are likely to have to pay royalty fees if their crops are contaminated by GM plant genes. It is also likely that farmers will not be allowed to save seeds and must instead purchase new seeds from companies every year, which undermines their power vis-à-vis transnational agri-businesses. A recent attempt to introduce open-field testing of GM crops in 2014, as well as counter-movements from civil society groups, will be discussed in chapter 5.

### ***1.2) Land grabs and the food-fuel nexus***

Section 1.4 in chapter 2 discussed the contradictory food-fuel connections where diversions of resources to agro-fuels production threaten food security without solving finite energy problems. Even though the international prices of rice, an important food grain in Thailand, adjusted downwards in the latter half of 2008 after dramatic spikes in 2007/2008, it has been noted that agro-fuels policies and changes in prices of production inputs contributed to a new higher price level in Thailand compare to before 2007.<sup>33</sup> Sections 1.5 and 1.6 in chapter 2 also discussed how global interests in food and agro-fuels production following the 2007/2008 spikes in global agri-food commodity prices have prompted transnational capital to engage in resource grabs and in speculations of agricultural commodity prices. Resource grabs

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<sup>31</sup> Isra News, “Judiciary Declared the State Was Not Guilty for GM Papaya Contamination, Greenpeace Feared Monsanto Monopoly,” April 2, 2013. (in Thai)

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Somporn Isawilanont and Sanit Kao-ian, *Dynamics of Thailand’s Rice Production Economy and The Future Outlook* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2009), 33. (in Thai)

issue extends beyond land grabs for agricultural purposes. However, due to limited space, this section focuses only on recent waves of agricultural land grabs in Thailand. Unequal land distribution and the contemporary land reform movement in Thailand will be discussed in detail in chapter 6.

A neo-Marxist perspective, discussed in chapter 2, can be used to explain increased global interests in land grabs and agro-fuel investments as the capitalist system's tendency to appropriate nature to ensure continuities of capital accumulation through "cheap" food and energy. Land grabs in developing or land-abundant countries can be seen as a form of accumulation by dispossession, which does not only help to secure relatively cheap production inputs, but also causes dispossession effects on small-scale farmers and marginalised rural populations, turning them into a reserve army of low-skilled and semi-skilled labours. Empirical evidence of land grabs and increased investments in agro-fuels in Thailand, discussed below, can be understood in this light. This section explores how both Thai and non-Thai capital, as well as other agents, actively engage in land grabs and agro-fuels production. Moreover, this section suggests that even though current land grabs for agro-fuels may be able to stimulate capital accumulation in the short and medium term, they are unlikely to solve the finite energy problem in the long run.

Since the 1980s, there have been growing conflicts in Thailand between the state's control over forest areas and local usage of land, and the mass purchases of land all over the country by capitalists, who often leave the land unutilised.<sup>34</sup> A study in 1999 suggests that, after the Asian economic crisis of 1997, over 70 percent of

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<sup>34</sup> Sittichai et al. (2002), 69-71.

land in the country is under-utilised.<sup>35</sup> In the early 2010s, there are many reports by farmers, real estate businesses, government officials and others, which suggest that both Thai and non-Thai capital have been investing in land and at various points along vertical agri-food chains to gain integrated systemic control.<sup>36</sup> Continual increases of fossil fuel prices have also led the Thai government to support production of agro-fuels, which drives up prices of sugar cane, cassava and palm oil.<sup>37</sup> The following paragraphs elaborate on these issues.

Non-Thai transnational capital is prohibited by the Foreign Business Act of 1999 to purchase land for agricultural purposes. In practice, however, there are many loopholes that have allowed non-Thais to control land for agricultural purposes, such as through Thai nominees. It is often difficult to gather information from farmers as they fear backlash,<sup>38</sup> but from what is available, it seems that land grabs in many provinces all over the country can be of various scales, such as from ten rai to over a thousand rai.<sup>39</sup> Contrary to the typical image of land grabs where land grabs are pictured as large-scale plantations, in the case of Thailand, land grabs can also occur

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<sup>35</sup> See abstract of Warin Wongharnchao, Land Institute Foundation et al., *A Study of Ownership and Usage of Land, as Well as Economic and Legal Measures to Maximise Land Usage* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2001). (in Thai)

<sup>36</sup> For example, Dr. Weerachai Nakwibulwong, Secretary General of ALRO, interviewed 14 February 2013, Bangkok. For interviews of state officials from DSI and Ministry of Commerce, as well as vice mayor of Pichit province, see: Post Today Newspaper's editors, "Foreign and Thai Capital' Purchases of Foundations of Agriculture," *Post Today*, February 20, 2010, reprinted in <<http://http://www.tja.or.th/>>. For other reports, such as from the president of Thai farmers' association, see: Dailynews, "Foreign Force Swallows Million Rai of Paddy Field. President of Thai Farmers' Association Exposed Dangerous Sign; Foreign Force's Land Grab Goals in Central and Northeastern Regions," *Dailynews (online)*, August 04, 2009; Manager Newspaper (weekly), "Foreign Force's Land Grabs in 25 provinces. Land Sold in Massive Volume by Farmers and Brokers," September 17, 2009; Matichon Newspaper, "Village Leader Tells of Capitalist Land Grabbing of Rice Fields," April 04, 2012. (in Thai)

<sup>37</sup> Isawilanont and Kao-ian (2009), 33 and 35.

<sup>38</sup> Mr. Prasit Boonchuey, President of Thai Rice Farmers' Association, quoted in Dailynews, "Foreign Force," (2009).

<sup>39</sup> DSI and Ministry of Commerce's preliminary investigation of foreign land grabs, quoted in Post Today Newspaper's editors, "Foreign and Thai Capital," (2010); Prasit Boonchuey quoted in Dailynews, "Foreign Force," (2009); BioThai and local informants quoted in Manager Newspaper (weekly), "Foreign Force's Land Grabs in 25 Provinces," (2009).

through networks of several small firms which were established to purchase land in different areas.<sup>40</sup>

There are also other arrangements similar to contract farming which allow non-Thais to control what is being produced, how it is produced and processed (for example, which company's hybrid seeds to use), and where products are distributed.<sup>41</sup> Non-Thai capital can hire Thai nominees or brokers to purchase and manage large plantations for them, and they can offer to rent land at much higher prices than prices paid by Thai farmers to ensure their access to large plots of land. Thai farmers are usually hired as labour in these land plots for the production of agricultural commodities (e.g. rice) by capital from various places such as Lebanon, Taiwan and Saudi Arabia. The products are then exported to countries of origin of these capital groups.<sup>42</sup> There are also reports of a growing number of Thai firms that provide "all-in-one" large-scale agricultural plantations to service non-Thai capital.<sup>43</sup> In the North, Northeast, Central, and South regions of the country, non-Thai capital are not only interested in land grabs for food productions, but also cash crops and energy crops.<sup>44</sup> Suratthani province in the South, for example, is known for having a lot of large-scale palm oil plantations owned by medium and large Thai and non-Thai (dominated by Malaysian and Singaporean capital) palm oil refinery

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<sup>40</sup> Local Act Organisation's (an NGO) study based on the database of the Department of Land, quoted in "Famous Business Families Stocking up Land All over Thailand, Jareon Rich with 6.3 Hundred Thousand Rai, Land Tax in Consideration," *Prachachat Turakijj (online)*, June 18, 2014. (in Thai)

<sup>41</sup> See: Dailynews, "Foreign Force," (2009) and Bangkok Business Newspaper, "President of Thai Farmers' Association Reports to DSI about Foreign Land Grabs of Rice Fields," August 06, 2009. (in Thai)

<sup>42</sup> Summary from interviews of Prasit Boonchuey in Dailynews, "Foreign Force," (2009) and Bangkok Business Newspaper, "President of Thai Farmers' Association," (2009). (in Thai).

<sup>43</sup> For example, see: Manager Newspaper (weekly), "Foreign Force's Land Grabs," (2009).

<sup>44</sup> For example, in the South there are reports of land grabs by Thai and Malaysian capital for palm oil plantations. (Prachachart Thurakit Newspaper, "Wave of Land Grabs for Speculations and Agro-Fuels Inputs due to Low Interest Rates and Rising Agricultural Commodity Prices," May 14, 2008.) According to the BioThai Foundation's investigation with help from farmer networks in over 19 provinces, the top six provinces for foreign land grabs are in the Central plain, including Ayuthya where there are Middle East capital investing in rice production. (Witoon Lienchamroon from BioThai, quoted in Manager Newspaper (weekly), "Foreign Force's Land Grabs," (2009).)

companies.<sup>45</sup> There are also other forms of agricultural investment by foreign capital. For example, some Japanese capital have reportedly purchased 49 percent shares (as limited by the Thai law) in rice mills and engaged in Japanese rice contract farming, while some Taiwanese capital have purchased shares in sugar factories in addition to their investments in sugar cane, palm oil and eucalyptus plantations.<sup>46</sup>

Interestingly, many large land holders in Thailand have interests in the energy sector, which further suggests the interconnections of the agri-food and energy sectors. Two of the biggest Thai transnational capital groups - the Charoen Pokphand (CP) group and Thai Beverage plc. (often referred to in Thailand as "Chang Beer" business Group) - have also joined the quest to secure agri-food production resources. They invest not only just in Thailand, but also abroad, as future profitability rises due to concerns around food security and energy scarcity. In 2008, the Thai Beverage group had over 100,000 rai of land in over 56 provinces.<sup>47</sup> In 2014, it is suggested that it has the control of over 630,000 rai of land through individual, family and company land ownerships.<sup>48</sup> They have also hired a former Director General of the Department of Agriculture, Anan Dalodom, to plan what can be grown in each area, with an emphasis on key commodities such as rice, rubber, sugar cane, cassava and palm oil. For example, rice is grown on over 10,000 rai of their land in Ayuthya.<sup>49</sup> It is estimated that Thai Beverage has become the biggest

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<sup>45</sup> Land Reform Network and Local Act, *A Report on the Study "Land Management and Social Justice: A Case Study of the Land Reform Network"*, Part of the Project to Encourage Social Justice, Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 2010), 106-108. (in Thai)

<sup>46</sup> Manager Newspaper (weekly), "Foreign Force's Land Grabs," (2009).

<sup>47</sup> According to a manager at TCC Agro which is part of the Thai Beverage group, quoted in Business Thai, "Thanin-Jaroen: 2 Rich Men Are Revolutionising Thai Agriculture!," May 08, 2008. (in Thai)

<sup>48</sup> Local Act Organisation's (an NGO) study based on the database of the Department of Land, quoted in *Prachachat Turakijj (online)*, "Famous Business Families Stocking up Land," June 18, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Manager Newspaper (weekly), "Foreign Force's Land Grabs," (2009).

owner of rubber and sugar cane plantations in Thailand.<sup>50</sup> The second largest land holder in Thailand is the CP group (over 200,000 rai),<sup>51</sup> which also utilises contract farming as a way to secure inputs for its biodiesel production plants. By 2017, CP plans to have over 500,000 rai of contract farms of palm oil in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar.<sup>52</sup> CP and contract farming in Thailand are discussed in greater detail in section 1.4. Other large landholders in Thailand include: United Palm Oil Industry Plc. (44,400 rai); the Crown Property Bureau (around 30,000 rai); IRPC Plc. (petro-chemical manufacturer which owns 17,000 rai); the Maleenont family (telecommunication business group which owns more than 10,000 rai); and Dr. Boon Wanasin, Executive Managing Director of Thonburi hospital group (around 10,000 rai).<sup>53</sup>

The Thai state and the private sector often suggest that Thai farmers will benefit when agricultural commodities fetch higher prices, due to food security concerns and the food-fuel connections (such discourses are discussed in part 3 of this chapter). However, the influx of resource grabs in recent years contributes to higher purchase prices of land and rental prices of agricultural land in many areas, which makes it increasingly difficult for small and medium size farmers to continue renting land. Problems of drastic increases of land and rental prices have been reported by many people such as the BioThai Foundation,<sup>54</sup> Dr. Permsak

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<sup>50</sup> Business Thai, "Thanin-Jaroen," (2008).

<sup>51</sup> Local Act Organisation's study based on the database of the Department of Land, quoted in *Prachachat Turakijj (online)*, "Famous Business Families Stocking up Land," June 18, 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Manager Newspaper (weekly), "CP Advances on Biodiesel Business, Contract Farming of Palm Oil in Indochina," March 21, 2008. (in Thai)

<sup>53</sup> Local Act Organisation's study based on the database of the Department of Land, quoted in *Prachachat Turakijj (online)*, "Famous Business Families Stocking up Land," June 18, 2014. (in Thai)

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Manager Newspaper (online), "Food Crisis Increases Pressure on Landless Farmers. Watch out for CP's Monopoly Control over 100,000 Million Baht Rice Seeds Market," May 01, 2008. (in Thai)



Mokarapirom (an academic and member of the National Reform Committee),<sup>55</sup> journalists' local sources,<sup>56</sup> and civil servants.<sup>57</sup> For example, Mr. Phraiwal Choomai from the Agricultural Office in Patlung province suggests that recent waves of land grabs have pushed the price of rubber plantations from 120,000 to 200,000 baht per rai.<sup>58</sup> Some locals reported that in Suphanburi province, land plots which used to cost around tens of thousands of baht (before 2007) now cost around 120,000 baht or more,<sup>59</sup> while in Chainat the rental price more than tripled from 500 baht per rai per year (before 2007) to 1,500 baht per rai per round of production (as reported in 2009).<sup>60</sup> At the national level, between 2008 to 2011 and 2012 to 2015, the average price of land increased 5 percent (8 percent in the South).<sup>61</sup> In areas with good access to public utilities, prices could double. Such increases in the prices of land also further stimulate large-scale purchases for speculation purposes.<sup>62</sup> In another new practice, rent is now charged not per year but per round of production, as landlords see that agri-food products can fetch higher prices.<sup>63</sup> Landlords also sometimes decide to stop renting and engage in agricultural production themselves.<sup>64</sup> Chapter 4 will also discuss how the paddy pledging scheme also contributed to the increased in prices of farmland.

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Matichon Newspaper, "National Reform Committee Suggests Land Reform to Take Advantage of Food Crisis," March 16, 2011. (in Thai)

<sup>56</sup> Manager Newspaper (weekly), "Foreign Force's Land Grabs," (2009).

<sup>57</sup> For example, complaints received from farmers were reported by Minister of Agriculture and Co-operatives (MOAC) in MOAC, "Ministry of Agriculture and Co-Operatives Tries to Stop Capitalists from Increasing Rent and Exploiting Farmers, Using Legal Means according to the Agricultural Land Rent Act," April 21, 2008. (in Thai)

<sup>58</sup> Reported in Prachachart Thurakit Newspaper, "Wave of Land Grabs", (2008).

<sup>59</sup> Manager Newspaper (weekly), "Foreign Force's Land Grabs," (2009).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Assistant Professor Dr. Duangmanee Laowakul, Faculty of Economics, Thammasart University, research presentation at the Food Security Assembly 2014 in Thailand, quoted in "Macro View of Land in Thailand Reveals Inequality and Highly Concentrated Land: Wealth in Poor People's Tears," *Isra News*, July 14, 2014. (in Thai)

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> MOAC (2008).

<sup>64</sup> Witton Lienchamroon quoted in Manager Newspaper (online), "Food Crisis Increases Pressure on Landless Farmers," (2008). (in Thai)

The recent spurs of land grabs in Thailand are likely to increase the scale of dispossession of small and medium scale farmers, or transform them into semi-farmers/semi-workers through contract farming arrangements. Some farmers have become farm managers to manage large-scale plantations to meet non-Thai capital's export orders.<sup>65</sup> As chapter 2 suggested, their situations are close to that of workers in the industrial sector. Farmers who still have their own land might also be increasingly tempted by short-term monetary gains and sell their land, even though future prospects as low or semi-skilled workers, or as part of the "reserve army of labour", can be rather bleak. In addition, even though Thailand is still a net exporter of food, recent waves of land and other forms of resource grabs have raised concerns over food security, environmental degradation, and reduction of biodiversity. After 2002, domestic prices of food and energy crops increased substantially, and many farmlands switched their production from food crops to energy crops. In total, energy crop plantation area increased from 18.6 million rai in 2002 to 22.3 million rai in 2007.<sup>66</sup> A regression study also suggests that fossil fuel prices positively correlate with prices of energy crops in Thailand, and to a lesser extent with prices of food crops. This suggests a future trend where more resources are likely to be devoted to energy crop production, resulting in rising costs of agri-food production and potential domestic food security problems.<sup>67</sup>

As discussed in chapter 2, given current technology, aggregate fossil energy used in the production of agro-fuels is higher than the energy contained in agro-fuel

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<sup>65</sup> During the author's field research in Thailand (October 2012-February 2013), a few farmers in the Central and Northeastern regions discussed having been offered positions as farm managers of certain agri-food commodities, or that they know of other farmers who took such jobs. An example include Ms. Nanta Haitook, President of Baan Tanon organic group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>66</sup> Isawilanont and Kao-ian (2009), 35.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 33 and 36.

outputs.<sup>68</sup> Hence, the growth of large-scale production of agro-fuels is unlikely to solve the finite energy problem. Many agricultural inputs such as fertilisers and chemicals are also derived from fossil fuels and it can be seen that, for example, fertiliser costs increased dramatically in 2008 as a result of higher fossil fuel prices.<sup>69</sup> In addition, there are also opportunity costs to consider with regard to agro-fuels production, as land could perhaps be used in other ecologically sustainable ways to benefit the majority of the population.<sup>70</sup>

Concerns over food and energy scarcities, which increase expected profitability of agriculture, have prompted not only the recent waves of land and other resource grabs, but also financial speculations on agricultural commodities which exaggerate prices beyond supply fundamentals. Although this section focuses on the food-energy nexus and land grabs, the thesis recognises intimate linkages between land grabs, finance capital, and speculations, as chapter 2 has discussed.<sup>71</sup> The next section discusses in greater detail some of these linkages, particularly how financial speculations contribute to volatile prices of some key commercial crops in Thailand.

### ***1.3) Commercial crops, volatile prices and speculations***

This section explores how financial speculations on agri-food products can contribute to increasingly volatile prices, which have dispossession effects on small

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<sup>68</sup> Pimentel and Patzek, "Ethanol Production Using Corn, Switchgrass, and Wood: Biodiesel Production Using Soybean and Sunflower," (2005), Patzek and Pimentel, "Thermodynamics of Energy Production from Biomass," (2006), quoted in Weis (2010), 324-327.

<sup>69</sup> Isawilanont and Kao-ian (2009), 47.

<sup>70</sup> An analysis of land grabs using the concept of opportunity costs has been used by Olivier De Schutter, "How Not to Think of Land-Grabbing: Three Critiques of Large-Scale Investments in Farmland," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 2 (March 2011): 249-279.

<sup>71</sup> For example, see Jennifer Clapp, "Food Price Volatility and Vulnerability in the Global South: Considering the Global Economic Context," *Third World Quarterly* 30, no. 6 (September 2009): 1183-1196.

and medium scale producers by making their revenues uncertain. Moreover, as will be discussed below using empirical evidence from Thailand, speculations can sometimes increase prices of food within a short period of time, which has similar effects to reductions in real wages of average consumers, which can lead to forced under-consumption. However, price increases do not necessarily proportionately benefit producers.

Important commercial agricultural products in Thailand include rice, rubber, cassava, maize, palm oil, and top major export products in terms of value include rubber, rice, shrimps, fish and their products, as well as sugar and cassava.<sup>72</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, in the past few years, non-commercial speculators have entered futures markets in large numbers, betting on rising prices.<sup>73</sup> For example, hedge funds saw sugar as “the new crude oil”.<sup>74</sup> These artificially high prices send problematic market signals to producers. When prices are high, producers are often encouraged to expand production, which then leads to higher supply and lower prices. Increased financial speculations amplifies these problems. In Thailand, sugar cane prices reached the highest level in 28 years in 2009, and the price level was estimated by Thai sugar mill associations to remain high for many years due to world demand (such as from India and China) and due to speculations by hedge funds. Thai sugar cane producers then increased production to respond to the higher prices.<sup>75</sup> However, producers in other countries also increased their production. In early 2014, prices of sugar cane dropped to near or below break-even prices for producers in Thailand, mainly because of increased world supply of sugar cane and

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<sup>72</sup> Office of Agricultural Economics (Thailand), *Agricultural Statistics of Thailand 2010*, 168.

<sup>73</sup> Clapp (2009), 1187.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Tharp, “Hedge Funds Find New Sweet Spot in Sugar,” *New York Post*, 30 September 2009.

<sup>75</sup> Matichon Newspaper, “3 Sugar Plants Associations Believe in the Long Bright Future of Sugar Cane and Sugar Industries, Pushing the State to Support Ethanol,” September 25, 2009. (in Thai)

sugar from India, China and Brazil.<sup>76</sup> Maize producers in Thailand have faced similar problems. For example, there was an expansion of maize production in Naan province after the high prices in 2007 and 2008.<sup>77</sup> However, the costs of production (seed, fertilizer and herbicide prices) doubled during the same period, while there was no significant increase in yield. Later on, prices received by producers dropped significantly (almost by half) due to increased supply and also due to imports of maize from neighbouring countries.<sup>78</sup>

Such cycles of "low supply-high price" and "high supply-low price" are common for agricultural commodities under current market arrangements, but speculations further complicate the situations. Some commercial plants such as palm oil, rubber, and other garden plants, require some fixed investments over a period of time before produce can be harvested, which means that producers could harshly be affected economically by fluctuating prices. Similar to the case of sugar, rubber in Thailand is grown mostly for export, and prices depend on various factors such as world supply and demand (particularly demand from large industrialised economies such as China, Japan, the US and the EU), as well as on speculations in Japanese and Singapore markets.<sup>79</sup> In early March 2011, prices of rubber in Thailand dropped drastically in the same direction as in futures markets of Tokyo and Singapore, as a

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<sup>76</sup> Thai Post Newspaper, "World Supply of Sugar Pulls down Prices of Sugar Cane. Thai Producers Ask the State for Help," December 06, 2013 and Than Settakit Newspaper, "Many Factors Cause Sugar Cane Prices to Drop," January 05, 2014. (in Thai)

<sup>77</sup> Muanfan Ratsongkwae, "CP Maize: Naan Case Study," in *CP and Thai Agriculture*, ed. CorpWatch-Thailand and BioThai (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2009), 133 and 135. (in Thai)

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 135-139.

<sup>79</sup> SATHAI (2009), 39 and 42; Post Today Newspaper, "Yanyong Reveals That Low Prices of Rubber Is due to Depressed Economic Conditions," September 06, 2013; Naew Na Newspaper, "Warn the State to Revise Measures for Rubber Prices. Three Strategies to Develop the Rubber Industry," December 13, 2012; President of the Thai Rubber Association, *Rubber Market Situation in 2013*, December 2013; Office of the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund quoted in Prachachart Thurakit Newspaper, "Speculations Causes Rubber Prices to Plummet and for Rubber Co-Operatives All over the Country to Lose over 10,000s Million All over the Country," March 16, 2011; Rubber Research Institute of Thailand quoted in Than Settakit Newspaper, "Rubber Prices Adjust Upwards according to Speculations in Tokyo," October 12, 2013. (in Thai)

response to concerns in the Middle East and other factors. This caused further speculations and downward spiral in prices. Drastic drops in prices (22 US dollars/ton in one week) caused small and medium rubber co-operatives and other players in Thailand to lose over 10,000 million baht.<sup>80</sup> Aside from such economic losses, intensive production of cash crops and energy crops also intensifies environmental problems.<sup>81</sup>

By relying on one or few of these commodities, small-scale or semi-dispossessed farmers face increased economic risks, as volatile prices make their revenues uncertain. They also face increased food insecurity due to reductions of biodiversity and food crops in their land.<sup>82</sup> Global financial speculations on basic food grains such as rice, can also affect the agri-food system and well-being of the majority of people in Thailand. The price spikes of 2007/2008 drove up domestic prices of rice, which negatively affected (especially low-income) consumers, while small and medium scale producers were not the main beneficiaries of the higher prices, as explained below.

Thailand produces around 20 million tons of rice per year. Roughly half of it is used for domestic consumption and the other half is exported.<sup>83</sup> Due to linkages with the global market, domestic price movements in Thailand closely follow world market prices. Between 1985 and 2011, the movements of domestic paddy and rice

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<sup>80</sup> Mr. Pherk Lertwangpong, President of the Rubber Co-operatives' Association of Thailand, quoted in Prachachart Thurakit Newspaper, "Speculations Causes Rubber Prices to Plummet," (2011). (in Thai)

<sup>81</sup> For example, negative environmental effects of rubber and palm oil plantations are discussed in SATHAI (Sustainable Agriculture Thailand), *Interesting Knowledge about Commercial Garden Plants: Case Studies of Rubber and Palm Oil*. (in Thai)

<sup>82</sup> SATHAI (2009), 11-18 and 64-65.

<sup>83</sup> Somporn Isawilanont and Prue Santithamrak, *A Report on Global and Thai Rice Production and Trade Situation 2011 and Future Tendency (KNIT Agricultural Policy No. 2012-1)* (Bangkok: KNIT, 2011), 2-3. (in Thai)

prices were in the same directions as export market prices.<sup>84</sup> A study from FAO also suggests that, although Thailand has some government interventions in terms of procurement and storage, domestic prices nevertheless follow world prices very closely (except in the 1960s and 1970s) such as between 2003 and 2007.<sup>85</sup> After 2008, prices of rice in important export markets became increasingly volatile,<sup>86</sup> and in recent years the paddy pledging scheme makes the situation more complicated (to be discussed in chapter 4). When international prices of rice surged from an average of \$378 per ton in December 2007 to more than \$700 per ton by the end of March 2008, domestic rice prices in Bangkok increased 17 percent between January and February 2008.<sup>87</sup> Between April and May 2008, a few food commodity prices in Bangkok became significantly higher, particularly Jasmine rice (103 percent), followed by brown sugar and meat.<sup>88</sup> This negatively affected not only low income and poor people in the city, but also the general population, as a field research in 2010 suggests that spending on food accounted for 30 to 50 percent of total household income across the country.<sup>89</sup> Interestingly, a study in 2003 suggests that, despite proximity to agricultural production resources, around 17.8 percent of households in rural areas spends more than 80 percent of their income on food.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Isawilanont and Kao-ian (2009), 30-31 and Isawilanont and Santithamrak (2011), 12.

<sup>85</sup> David Dawe, "Have Recent Increases in International Cereal Prices Been Transmitted to Domestic Economies? The Experience in Seven Large Asian Countries" (Rome: Agricultural Development Economics Division, FAO, 2008), 6-7.

<sup>86</sup> Isawilanont and Kao-ian (2009), 30-31 and Isawilanont and Santithamrak (2011), 12.

<sup>87</sup> Dawe (2008), 8.

<sup>88</sup> Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion, Four Regions Slum Network, and Committee of Thai labour solidarity, *A Survey of 9 Consumer Products Prices and Effects on the People* (Bangkok, 2008), quoted in Prachason (2008), 44.

<sup>89</sup> Field research by the National Planning Committee for Food Security in 2010, quoted in Witoon Lienchamroon, "Suggestions to Avoid Food Crisis for Thailand," in *Reform the Agricultural Sector for Food Security: Analysis and Practical Policies* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2011), 262. (in Thai)

<sup>90</sup> Ministry of Public Health, *A Survey on Food and Nutrition of Thailand, 5th Assessment* (Bangkok, 2003), 60, quoted in Prachason (2009), 19-20.

Rice producers in Thailand have occasionally benefited from increased prices, but not as much as intermediaries and large-scale corporations operating along the rice export supply chain. It has been noted that the increased in prices received by farmers tends to be proportionately less than the increased in wholesale and export prices.<sup>91</sup> A study based on interviews of rice mill operators and rice exporters, as well as figures from the Office of Agricultural Economics (OAE), suggests that during the global food price spikes of 2007/2008 (between 2007 and 2008), farmers' average costs of paddy production increased around 60 percent; variable costs (labour, seeds and other inputs) increased around 44 percent while other fixed costs, such as rent, increased over 108 percent.<sup>92</sup> Profits accrued to farmers, however, increased 52 percent between 2007 and 2008, which accounted to around 18.5 percent of total profits in rice export supply chains – a reduction from 21 percent in 2007.<sup>93</sup> Profits accruing to middlemen, on the other hand, increased 440 percent, which amounted to 8.5 percent of total profits in 2008, which was a massive increase compared to their share of 2.8 percent in 2007.<sup>94</sup> Profits accruing to rice mills increased 16 percent between 2007 and 2008 (profits of rice mills were already substantially increasing by 128 percent between 2005 to 2008) and, most importantly, exporters' profits increased 134 percent, which amounted to 42.7 percent of total profits in rice export supply chains in 2008.<sup>95</sup>

Rice mills and exporters had lion's shares of total profits in the late 2000s. Between 2005 and 2008, rice mills and exporters' profits amounted to around 73 to

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<sup>91</sup> Isawilanont and Kao-ian (2009), 33.

<sup>92</sup> Nattakarn Rodmua, *An Analysis of Costs and Process of Thai Rice Export. A Dissertation for a Master's Degree in Economics, Thammasart University*. (Bangkok: Thammasart University, 2009), 42-43. (in Thai) (author's calculation)

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 42-43. (author's calculation)

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 42-43. (author's calculation)

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 42-43. (author's calculation)



77 percent of total profits of rice exports.<sup>96</sup> Such distribution of profits is likely to be, at least partially, the result of monopolistic/monopsonistic structures of the paddy and rice markets, as well as the result of the paddy pledging scheme (to be discussed in chapter 4). In 2009, there were various news reports that rice mills often hoard rice to bargain for higher prices from exporters when international market prices were expected to be higher. Such actions help to push up prices of rice in Thai domestic markets without yielding higher economic benefits to small-scale farmers.<sup>97</sup>

As the next section elaborates, farmers whose revenues are already uncertain due to volatile prices of agri-food commodities can also be subjected to monopoly power in the markets, which dictate prices and pass on the burden of depressed prices to smaller players. The next section also discusses contract farming arrangements in Thailand which, in theory, seem to provide some certainty and less risks for producers, with fixed guaranteed channels to sell products and pre-agreed upon prices. However, in reality, there are some inequitable contract farming arrangements in Thailand which enable surplus appropriations from producers to agri-businesses through market exchanges of agri-food inputs and outputs.

#### ***1.4) Monopoly power, large agri-businesses and surplus appropriation***

As chapter 2 discussed, the neo-Marxist critique of the corporate agri-food system suggests the tendency for monopoly capital to emerge in the capitalist system, and that monopoly capital can use their power to appropriate surplus through their monopoly controls, such as over production inputs, trade channels, and credits. The

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43.

<sup>97</sup> For example, see Thairath (online), “Rice Mills Slowly Sell Their Rice to Speculate on Prices While Exporters Ask the Government to Sell Its Rice Stock. Ministry of Commerce Also Threatens to Sell Its Own Brand of Rice,” December 14, 2009. (in Thai)

previous sections have briefly suggested that there are certain degrees of monopoly control over production inputs such as seeds and land in Thailand. As for agricultural chemicals, a study suggests that the ten biggest importers of agricultural chemicals (out of around 200 companies) controlled 52.64 percent of market shares in Thailand in 2007.<sup>98</sup> This section discusses monopoly power and appropriations of surplus in the agri-food system in Thailand in greater detail. It argues that many large agri-businesses have managed to control production inputs, credits, methods, as well as processing and trade channels of many agricultural products. The following subsections discuss examples of such large agri-businesses and contract farming arrangements in Thailand which facilitate systematic monopoly control over agri-food chains.

### ***Agri-businesses and contract farming: integrated monopoly control***

One of the largest and most influential agri-businesses in Thailand is the Charoen Pokphand (CP) group, which started out as a seed company and then grew into a modern large-scale chicken raising business. At present, it has become a leading transnational company based in Thailand with over a hundred companies around the world, including in Asia, Europe, North America and the Middle East, with businesses in many sectors aside from agro-industry, such as petrochemical, communications, real estate, etc.<sup>99</sup> CP has considerable power in some agri-food commodity chains in Thailand. It holds a large amount of land and also engages in contract farming of many products such as poultry, pork, and fish. In Thailand, CP controlled over 20 percent of the market in chicken production, 20 percent in the

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<sup>98</sup> Rapijan Phurisamban, "Basic Information on the Market and Usage of 4 High- Priority Agricultural Chemicals in the Monitoring List," in *An Academic Conference to Monitor Agricultural Chemicals 1, 16-17 June 2011*, ed. National Committee to Plan for Food Security (Bangkok, 2011), 15. (in Thai)

<sup>99</sup> Summary from CorpWatch-Thailand and BioThai, *CP and Thai Agriculture* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2008), 11-20 (in Thai) and CP's website <<http://www.cpthailand.com/>>, retrieved 30 April 2014.

pork retail sector, 40 percent in animal feed, and 20 percent of the total export markets in the broiler sector in 2001.<sup>100</sup> The next sub-section focuses on CP's monopoly power in the modern retail business in Thailand, while part 2 of the chapter discusses CP's linkages with the Thai state in greater detail.

According to the FAO Integrated Pest Management regional programme, contract farming is becoming the most dominant export production system in Thailand.<sup>101</sup> Even though it does not apply to all cases and all agri-food commodities, some contract farming arrangements in Thailand can be seen as the amalgamation of monopoly control over productive resources, processing, trade channels, and credit. Many studies suggest that a lot of contract farming arrangements yield lower benefits to small-scale farmers compare to contracting companies, such as the 2003 report by the Thai Senate Committee on Agriculture and Co-operatives.<sup>102</sup> Through contract farming, agri-businesses can gain complete control over production inputs, methods, and distribution. They also encourage commodification and capitalist agriculture, discussed in section 1.1, and farmers are often converted into mere "workers in a vast agro-industrial assembly line" who perform specialised production skills.<sup>103</sup>

Contract farmers tend to have low bargaining power and usually have to carry production risks, such as those associated with the weather and climate change.

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<sup>100</sup> FAO, *Project on livestock industrialisation. Trade and Social-health-environment impacts in developing countries*, July 2003, quoted in Isabelle Delforge, *Contract Farming in Thailand: A view from the farm*, A report for Focus on the Global South, (Bangkok: Focus on the Global South, 2007), 11.

<sup>101</sup> Delforge (2007), 4-5.

<sup>102</sup> Senate Committee on Agriculture and Co-operatives, *Report on the investigation on contract farming of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Co-operatives* (Bangkok, 2003), quoted in Delforge (2007), 5.

<sup>103</sup> Sompop Manarangsan, "Contract Farming and Thailand's Agricultural Development," in *Our Lands, Our Lives*, ed. Buddhadeb Chaudhuri (Bangkok: ACFOD, 1992), 156, quoted in Bello, Cunningham and Li (1998), 164.

The returns that they receive can sometimes be lower than the income received by non-agricultural sector labourers.<sup>104</sup> A study conducted between 2010 and 2012 of contract farming of five commodities (pork, chicken, fish, sugar cane and maize) in four provinces of Thailand also suggests that small-scale farmers tend to have lower bargaining power compare to agri-businesses. From standard surveys of 41 farmers: 90.2 percent of the farmers suggested that they had to carry most of the production risks and investment costs; 87.8 percent felt powerless to bargain to determine prices and agreed that companies can set all the terms regarding product standards and harvest time; and 73.2 percent were affected by price fluctuations because companies pass on lower prices to them.<sup>105</sup> Aside from having to carry disproportionate parts of production risks, small-scale farmers usually have to purchase their inputs only from the agri-businesses they are selling their products to.<sup>106</sup> A study in 2011 found that, with contract farming, over 70 percent of small-scale farmers' costs of production were in different forms of payment to agri-businesses. In the case of fish and chicken contract farming, payment for production inputs can be as high as 85 to 90 percent of total costs.<sup>107</sup>

There are many reasons why Thai farmers sign up for contract farming arrangements, but one cannot simply argue that they have complete freedom of choice under a competitive market economy, as monopoly power exerts influence over production inputs, trade channels, and access to credits in the agri-food system,

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<sup>104</sup> Bootsara Limnirandkul, Pruek Yipmantasiri, Cho-paka Muangsuk and Pratanthip Kramol, "Contract Farming and the Opportunity of Development of Small-scale farmers," A paper presented at the Multiple Cropping Centre Seminar, Faculty of Agriculture, Chiang Mai University, 2006, 99. (in Thai)

<sup>105</sup> Thodsapol Thadsanakulpan, *Farmers' Deadly Noose: Problems and Farmer Rights under Contract Farming* (Bangkok: Working Committee for the Fair Contract Farming Network, 2013), 31, 44, 55, 64-65. (in Thai)

<sup>106</sup> For example, interviews with Scott Christensen, 31 March 1994 and Taweekiat Prasertcharoensuk, Bangkok, 18 June 1993, quoted in Bello, Cunningham, and Li (1998), 164.

<sup>107</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon, "The Role of Agri-Businesses and the Changes in Rural Thailand and Thai Society," November 25, 2011, 8. (in Thai)

which limits options and choices of small-scale producers. As suggested by a field research of pig and chicken farmers in three provinces of the Central and North-eastern regions in 2004, in addition to higher expected income, farmers signed the contracts because they had no capital to set up independently, as it was difficult for them to receive loans from other sources. If they signed contracts with the company, the company would provide inputs and access to bank loans. In addition, there was no market for independent farmers who want to raise chicken broilers, as contracting companies controlled the majority of trade channels.<sup>108</sup>

Contract farming arrangements of some commodities require large sums of fixed capital investments, often financed through bank loans, which discourage farmers from breaking off their contracts when they find the contracts to be inequitable. For example, egg contract farmers at Ampur Banpong community, Chiang Mai province, had to invest a lot in production equipments and often used their land as collateral. However, the contracting companies seem to have higher power as they can stop purchasing from them at any time. In addition, there were a lot of negative externality problems in terms of pollution and unhygienic conditions, which cause grave conflicts in the community.<sup>109</sup> The author's interviews of a few egg contract farmers at Romphothong village, Chiang Mai province in 2012 also support these points.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Delforge (2007), 9 and 12. For the study, 19 chicken farmers and 7 pig farmers from three provinces were interviewed. The study found that 91 percent of the total costs of production were attributable to inputs provided by the companies such as chicks, feed and medicine. (*Ibid*, 14 and 16).

<sup>109</sup> The community is in Tambol Mae-fhaeg, Ampur Sansai, Chiang Mai. (Jirawat Rakchat, "From Farming to Contract Eggs Chicken: The Growth of Agri-Business," in *Thai Countryside: Medium Size Farmers and Landless Agricultural Labourers*, ed. Jamari Chiengthong et al. (Chiang Mai: Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Social Science Faculty, University of Chiang Mai, 2011), 245-246 and 284-287. (in Thai))

<sup>110</sup> Mr. Kampol Kongsathan, Ms. Amporn Suyakomol and Ms. Pimlada Pheekaew, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

### *Agri-businesses and monopoly control over agri-food processing and trade*

This subsection uses examples of rice, fruits and vegetables to demonstrate how participants in some agri-food chains in Thailand tend to have unequal market power. In the case of rice, a study found that in the late 1990s and early 2000s, some farmers had to sell their paddy to rice mills even though they knew the rice mills were cheating on them, or that they were paid less than what they should have received. This was because they lacked other channels to sell their paddy, and it would cost just the same to transport the paddy to other mills.<sup>111</sup> This study also found that gross revenues and net profits of Jasmine rice traders were quite high, as compared to that of farmers.<sup>112</sup> Rice trade in Thailand, before the implementation of the paddy pledging scheme in recent years, was dominated by few big firms. In 2007, the ten biggest companies exported 70 percent of total Thai rice export. The biggest company was Nakhon Luang or Capital Rice, which exported 17.6 percent of total rice export.<sup>113</sup> In 2010, five companies exported 50 percent of total export.<sup>114</sup> Monopolistic power also helps to explain why, as discussed in the previous section, when prices of rice were high during the global food price crisis of 2007 and 2008, farmers did not benefit as much as rice mills and exporters. Chapter 4 will also discuss how the paddy pledging scheme has helped to increase the power of large rice mills and traders.

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<sup>111</sup> Narong Phetprasert, *Rice Politics Under State-Capital Monopoly. Journal of Political Economy (for the community)* (Bangkok: Edison Press, 2005), 117-118. (in Thai)

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-95.

<sup>113</sup> Than Settakit Newspaper, "Fat Rice Traders! 6,000/ton Profit Export to Malaysia," June 12, 2008. (in Thai)

<sup>114</sup> The information was reported by the Thai Rice Export Association. Asia Golden Rice was the number one exporter (1.7-1.8 million tons), followed by Capital Cereals and Capital Rice which are companies in the same group (1.1-1.2 million tons), CP Inter-trade and Chai-porn rice (together another 700,000-800,000 tons). (Prachachart Thurakit Newspaper, "Top Rice Exporter, Asia Golden Rice, Received Right to Purchase Government's Stock at Low Price -Medium/small Size Companies at a Disadvantage," January 13, 2011. (in Thai))

Another good example of monopoly power in the agri-food export business is in the case of longans - a type of fruit which can be exported in fresh or dried forms. Mr. Pitak Saengsin, Vice President of the Chiang Mai branch of the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operative (BAAC), suggests that the monopoly power of around 4 to 5 traders makes it possible for them to depress prices received by smaller-scale traders and farmers. China is the main export market of Thai longans, but Chinese importers prefer to deal with large-scale longan middlemen in Thailand, which help to increase their power. Without connections, it is very difficult to compete in the business. For example, delays at Chinese customs may spoil the products, and hence can be used to eliminate competition or to force collaborations.<sup>115</sup>

At first glance, domestic fruits and vegetable central/wholesale markets in Thailand might appear to be competitive with many players.<sup>116</sup> Further study, however, suggests that there are some well-established "networks" backed by large capital or influential individuals who wield considerable power along some commodity chains. The BAAC in Chiang Mai had tried to directly collect products from farmers and find channels to sell them to reduce the power of middlemen. However, even when they sold the products at lower prices at a central market, virtually nobody bought the products. This is because traders only buy from their usual networks. If they buy products from someone else, such as from the BAAC, they might face retributions. In other words, some agri-food products, such as onions, which are sold at central and wholesale markets such as Talad-Thai, See-

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<sup>115</sup> Mr. Pitak Saengsin, Vice President of the BAAC's Chiang Mai branch, interviewed 2 November 2012, the BAAC office, Chiang Mai.

<sup>116</sup> For example, a study in 2002 by TDRI suggests that there was high competition in fruits and vegetable central/wholesale markets in Thailand (Nipon Phuaphongsakorn et al., *The Retail Business in Thailand: Impact of the Large Scale Multinational Corporation Retailers* (Bangkok: TDRI, 2002). (in Thai))

mum-muang, and Ratchaburi wholesale markets, are likely to be controlled by certain individuals and their networks. Smaller-scale traders are, overall, more concerned about maintaining good long-term relationships with these monopoly networks and influential individuals who have extensive controls over many agri-food product supply chains, rather than with short-term price competitiveness.<sup>117</sup> Such mafia-like informal rules of the market are compatible with the widespread acceptance of patron-client relationships in Thai society, which are discussed in the next part of the chapter as part of the hegemonic governance structures. Monopolies and patron-client relationships can obstruct new players to enter the market and to compete. Smaller players are allowed to enter some small retail markets, such as on the streets or markets in front of hospitals, but not the central wholesale markets which determine nationwide retail prices.<sup>118</sup>

In sum, there is evidence to suggest that, in many cases, intermediaries in agri-food supply chains wield considerable market power, which allows them to appropriate surplus from small-scale farmers. Similarly, there are also monopolies in the modern retail trade sector where agri-food products are important components. Studies suggest that, with increased vertical concentrations along agri-food chains in both developed and developing countries, supermarkets now play a huge role in product development, branding, supplier selection and distribution. They can use their market power to exercise control along the chains. For example, they can specify how products should be grown, harvested, transported, processed and stored.<sup>119</sup> In Thailand, a few companies which developed through alliances of Thai

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<sup>117</sup> Mr. Pitak Saengsin, Vice President of the BAAC's Chiang Mai branch, interviewed 2 November 2012, the BAAC office, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> See: John Humphrey, "Policy Implications of Trends in Agribusiness Value Chains," *The European Journal of Development Research* 18, no. 4 (2006): 574–575; Lawrence Busch and Carmen



and non-Thai capital, have been able to control major market shares in the national modern retail sector. Supermarkets in Thailand have approximately 40 to 50 percent share of the national fruit and vegetable market,<sup>120</sup> and many agri-food products are now being sold through modern trade channels of varying scales, ranging from large hypermarkets to village-level convenience stores.

Following two major business takeovers in the early 2010s, the two biggest Thai capital groups in the modern retail sector are the CP group and the Central group.<sup>121</sup> CP's annexation of Siam Makro (the biggest wholesale and retail company in Thailand) in 2013 further reaffirms the status of the CP group as the biggest monopoly transnational agri-business and agri-food retail giant operating in Thailand. In addition to having partial ownership and management interests in Tesco-Lotus, the biggest hypermarket-supermarket company in Thailand largely owned by Tesco (British supermarket giant), CP also owns 7-11 and CP Fresh Mart convenient stores in Thailand, which have numerous branches throughout the country. This means that CP has some control and influence over three out of the four biggest retail companies operating in Thailand (7-11, Tesco-Lotus, Makro, Big C). It has been estimated that the combined turnover of 7-11 and Makro in 2013 was

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Bain, "New! Improved? The Transformation of the Global Agrifood System," *Rural Sociology* 69, no. 3 (2004): 321–346.

<sup>120</sup> Yaneer Srimanee and Jayant Kumar Routray, "The Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Chains in Thailand: Policy Impacts and Implications," *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management* 40, no. 9 (2012), 660.

<sup>121</sup> In 2010, Big C hypermarkets, owned by Casino Guichard Perrachon from France and Jiratiwat family (Central group), took over Carrefour hypermarkets which were owned by French capital, to be able to compete with Tesco-Lotus (CP has partial ownership) which had significantly higher market share and retail stores (Than Settakit Newspaper, "Close the Deal Carrefour and Big C, Strategic Take Over," November 22, 2010.). Then, in 2013, CP ALL company (owned by Jiarawanont family) took over one of the biggest wholesale and retail company - Siam Makro- from HSV Netherlands company. (Manager Newspaper (online), "CP Took over Makro, Swallowed Thailand, Advancing on Asian Markets," April 27, 2013.)

around 300,000 million baht, or 49 percent of total market share, while Tesco-Lotus had around 25 percent.<sup>122</sup>

In essence, Thai capital in the modern retail business, similar to Thai capital which engages in land grabs, do not seem to behave significantly differently from non-Thai capital groups, which are generally stimulated by capital accumulation. The growth and development of modern trade in Thailand have largely been a result of the adoption of advanced capitalist countries' transnational retail companies' business models and management techniques, implemented through co-operations and joint investments with transnational companies based in Thailand. The CP group, for example, learned and imported management techniques from transnational businesses in advanced capitalist countries.<sup>123</sup> It has also been noted that before 1997, the Central group did not play a major role in the management of Big C and Carrefour even though they were major share holders.<sup>124</sup> After the Asian economic crisis of 1997, CP and Central groups sold most shares of their hypermarkets (Lotus, Big C and Carrefour) to non-Thai transnational companies.<sup>125</sup> Joint co-operations seem to be mutually beneficial to both non-Thai and Thai transnational companies. For example, CP tried to learn from Tesco as it expanded its operations in countries such as China and also used connections with Tesco to export its poultry products to

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<sup>122</sup> Manager Newspaper (online), "CP Took over Makro", (2013).

<sup>123</sup> For example, when it opened its first supermarket in Thailand in 1990, CP invited two managers from Wal-Mart to be its management consultants. (Athiwat Sapphaitoon, *6 Mega Retail Business Empire: Various Marketing Techniques for Modern Trade, Case Study and Lessons from Thailand*, (Bangkok: Phueng-ton, 2002), 241, 291-292. (in Thai))

<sup>124</sup> Suthichart Jirathiwat, a manager in the Central group, interviewed in Wirat Sangthongkam et al, *70 years Jirathiwat: Central's competition and growth*, (Bangkok: Manager Classic, 2003), 126, quoted in Karnchuchat (2008), 238.

<sup>125</sup> Weerayuth Karnchuchat, "Thai Retail Business: Two Cities Divide," in *The Struggles of Thai Capital 2: Politics, Culture and Survival*, ed. Pasuk Phongpaichit (Bangkok: Matichon, 2006), 217. (in Thai)

the UK,<sup>126</sup> while Tesco benefited from CP's cultural and political linkages in Thailand and China.<sup>127</sup>

It is possible for the two dominant business groups and their associated allies in the retail sector to use their market power to manipulate the agri-food system in Thailand, such as to impose inequitable trade deals with small and medium size suppliers who have less bargaining power in the market. Large suppliers, on the other hand, may be able to sign exclusive supply and territory deals to further limit or eliminate competitions in the market. In 2002, there were reports by suppliers of various products to the Ministry of Commerce which claim that suppliers were charged unfair fees by retail giants who used these fees to cover their losses from predatory pricing.<sup>128</sup> Often, agricultural products such as rice were sold at low prices to promote sales of other products, which depressed rice prices.<sup>129</sup> Another study in 2002 by the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) suggests that small suppliers had to pay around 7 to 10 percent of their sales revenue as fees to hypermarkets.<sup>130</sup> In addition, there were various reports from small and medium retail businesses in many provinces that they were being squeezed out of the market.<sup>131</sup>

The monopolistic market power of large hypermarkets can further support the dominance of large agri-businesses and large-scale middlemen in agri-food supply chains, which further reduces the power and choices of both consumers and

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<sup>126</sup> Than Settakij News, 27-30 August 2000, quoted in Karnchuchat (2006), 239 and Arunee Pholnoi, *Retail and Wholesale Trade's Strategies* (Bangkok: Pansan, 2003), 137. (in Thai)

<sup>127</sup> Pholnoi (2003), 55 and Karnchuchat (2006), 337.

<sup>128</sup> Pholnoi (2003), 71, 76, 78, 81-82.

<sup>129</sup> The Parliament's Committee of Commerce, *Report on the Study of Problems and Effects of Modern Trade* (Bangkok, 2003), 9. (in Thai)

<sup>130</sup> Puapongsakorn et al. (2002), x-xi, 204 and 216. Suppliers of fresh fruits, meat and seafood might had been able to pay less.

<sup>131</sup> The Parliament's Committee of Commerce (2003), 7.

producers. The CP group, for example, uses their retail outlets as market channels for their agri-food products, such as poultry and frozen food.<sup>132</sup> In addition, as a few studies suggest, hypermarket giants prefer to deal with large-scale suppliers who can meet their standards.<sup>133</sup> Smaller-scale producers and suppliers may not be able to gain significant profits after having to pay fees charged by large retailers. Naso producer rice mill (to be discussed in chapter 5) in Yasothon province, for example, had tried to supply rice to many hypermarket companies, only to discover that huge fees imposed by the companies did not make the sales worthwhile.<sup>134</sup> At the same time, it is increasingly difficult for smaller-scale producers and suppliers to sell their products through alternative channels, especially if they need to sell perishable agri-food products in large volumes, given that retail giants take up large percentages of total modern retail market shares and have the tendency to crowd out smaller retail businesses. The next part also discusses CP's ties to the Thai state.

## **Part 2: Governance structures of the hegemonic agri-food system in Thailand**

The previous part of the chapter has discussed how the mainstream agri-food production-distribution practices in Thailand aid capital accumulation. Production-distribution practices, however, are only parts of the hegemonic agri-food system in Thailand. From a Gramscian theoretical perspective discussed in chapter 2, hegemony encompasses more than just the economic structure, but also governance and ideological structures. This part of the chapter discusses the hegemonic

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<sup>132</sup> Pawida Pananont and Weerayuth Karnchuchat, "Thai Capital Expands Abroad," in *The Struggles of Thai Capital 1: Adaptation and Dynamics*, ed. Pasuk Phongpaichit (Bangkok: Matichon, 2006), 329 (in Thai) and Pholnoi (2003), 65. For example, Makro has 58 branches in Thailand in over 50 provinces while 7-11 has over 6,000 branches in Thailand. (Manager Newspaper (online), "CP Took over Makro," (2013).)

<sup>133</sup> Puapongsakorn et al. (2002), 214; Srimanee and Routray (2012), 665; Pholnoi (2003), 69.

<sup>134</sup> Ms. Chutima, Muangman, manager of Naso producer rice mill, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

governance structures of the agri-food system in Thailand, while part 3 discusses the hegemonic ideological order that helps to sustain the hegemonic agri-food system. This thesis understands agri-food governance to include public, private, formal and informal frameworks – or rules and norms – that affect the agri-food system in Thailand. Even though this chapter concentrates on hegemonic aspects of agri-food governance, it should be noted that there can also be counter-hegemonic governance structures, which will be discussed in the following chapters. While this chapter discusses the central role of the Thai state in the maintenance of hegemonic governance structures that support the hegemonic agri-food system, chapters 4 to 6 will discuss how some smaller parts of the Thai state support counter-hegemonic projects which challenge the mainstream agri-food system. This serves to highlight one of the central arguments of this thesis regarding how the lines between hegemony and counter-hegemony can be quite blurred, and that the Thai state should not be seen as a monolithic entity.

Chapter 2 has discussed important problems of the global mainstream agri-food system, which partially arise from existing neo-liberal agri-food production and trade governance, as well as the lack of effective global governance structures to regulate transnational capital from, for example, land grabs and excessive speculations on agri-food commodity prices. Governance structures, such as those relating to private intellectual property rights and trade liberalisation, as well as regulations (or the lack of them) on market monopolies and contract farming, can be used as methods of accumulation by dispossession. The following section 2.1 explores the role of domestic forces in shaping hegemonic agri-food governance structures in Thailand, with a particular focus on the Thai state's policies and national laws, which tend to be of similar characters to that of neo-liberal/neo-

classical economics-embedded policies criticised in chapter 2. Section 2.1 also discusses political-cultural-historical informal norms in Thailand, particularly those of patron-client relations, which help to explain the crony nature of the Thai state that aids capital accumulation in many ways. Section 2.2 then focuses on the role of transnational forces in shaping hegemonic agri-food governance in Thailand, such as through conditions of loans, trade agreements and private agri-food commodity standards. This section also elaborates on how hegemonic transnational influence is mediated through various domestic forces in Thailand.

### ***2.1) Hegemonic domestic forces' influence on the governance structures***

This section focuses on the role of the Thai state in establishing and sustaining governance structures which support the hegemonic capitalist agri-food system. It also discusses the privileged position of the Crown Property Bureau which is a large holder of land. In addition, this section discusses how patron-client relations can be seen as important informal norms underlying the crony and pro-capital accumulation nature of the Thai state, which help to sustain the hegemonic agri-food system.

### ***Policies to aid capital accumulation through the agri-food sector***

The Thai state has consistently promoted capital accumulation through the agri-food sector, and also favoured large agri-businesses at the expense of small-scale farmers and consumers. For example, when the Green Revolution production paradigm was first introduced, the Thai state encouraged Thai farmers to stop using traditional seeds and to purchase new seed varieties or high-yield variety (HYV) seeds from the state and corporations.<sup>135</sup> Markets for maize seeds, for example, are now dominated

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<sup>135</sup> Rojanaprai Wong et al. (2004), 50-59.

by a few agri-businesses.<sup>136</sup> The Thai state has also favoured the industrial sector at the expense of the agricultural sector. For example, the Thai state depressed prices of some agricultural commodities to keep industrial workers' wages low in the past,<sup>137</sup> such as through rice premium or ad valorem tax on rice exports.<sup>138</sup> It has been suggested that the Thai state's policy to use agriculture to subsidise industry was not a transitory policy like in some other countries. Instead, it is a permanent policy, as substantial parts of government revenues do not go back to improve agriculture.<sup>139</sup>

Since the early 1960s, agri-businesses could secure packages of tax breaks, duty privileges and other promotional measures,<sup>140</sup> and agricultural export promotion policies were clearly adopted since the 1970s.<sup>141</sup> In the 5th National Economic and Social Development (NESD) plan (1982-1986), agri-businesses were given high priority.<sup>142</sup> It has been suggested that the domination of agri-businesses in Thailand, starting in the 1970s and 1980s, can partially be seen as a "symbolic political victory" of the elites, following violent repressions of agrarian movements in the 1970s which weakened the rural population politically (to be discussed in chapter 4). Farmers were also weakened economically due to the decline of primary commodity prices in the 1980s.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Lienchamroon (2011), 6.

<sup>137</sup> Apichai Puntasen and Paradorn Preedasak, "Agriculture in Thailand at the Cross-Road," *ASEAN Economic Bulletin* 15, no. 1 (1998), 90-92.

<sup>138</sup> Bello, Cunningham and Li (1998), 135.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

<sup>140</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand: Economy and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 59-60.

<sup>141</sup> Jasper Goss and David Burch, "From Agricultural Modernisation to Agri-Food Globalisation: The Waning of National Development in Thailand," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 6 (2001), 978; Puntasen and Preedasak (1998), 92; Bello, Cunningham, and Li (1998), 133-135.

<sup>142</sup> Tirawuth Senakham and Witoon Panyakul, "The State and Agri-Businesses: From 'See-Prasan' to Agricultural Council," in *Analysis and Policy Suggestions to Develop Alternative Agriculture: A Book for the Assembly of Alternative Agriculture 10-15 November 1992, Thammasart University* (Bangkok: Alternative Agriculture Network, 1992), 158-163 (in Thai) as well as Goss and Burch (2001), 979.

<sup>143</sup> Goss and Burch (2001), 979.

Vertical integrations of farming, processing and high value-added exports were encouraged by the state, such as through the Office of Agricultural Economics (OAE) and the Department of Agricultural Extensions (DAE).<sup>144</sup> There were also cases in which state officials, such as from the Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO), used their positions to encourage farmers to grow crops for companies in exchange for financial arrangements.<sup>145</sup> On the other hand, as discussed in the previous part, little has been done to ensure fair and equitable contracts between agri-businesses and farmers. The Thai state also supports contract farming in neighbouring countries such as Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia through the Aeyawadee-Chaopraya-Mekong Economic Co-operation (ACMECS) agreement. Transnational Thai agri-business investors also receive tax exemptions when they import raw agricultural commodities into Thailand from these countries.<sup>146</sup> This suggests that the Thai state also aids accumulation by Thai capital in surrounding regions of Thailand. As discussed briefly in the previous section, these imports from lower-cost countries can help to depress domestic prices and hurt Thai producers economically.

Despite concerns over the recent global rush for food-energy land grabs, by 2014 there is still no clear Thai state policy to safeguard agricultural land for food production. Although a law to protect agricultural land in Thailand has been drafted, it has not been passed. The Thai state, however, started to promote agro-fuels since early 2000s. It also supports conversions of agricultural land for the production of

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<sup>144</sup> Songsak Sriboonchitta, *Overview of Contract Farming in Thailand: Lessons Learned*. ADBI Discussion Paper 112. (Tokyo: Asian Development Bank, 2008), 1-2; the OAE's strategies for agricultural commodities (2002-2006) and DAE's "Plan to encourage safe and up to standard agricultural commodities," (2006), quoted in Prachason (2008), 41.

<sup>145</sup> Taweekiat Prasertcharoensuk, interviewed 18 June 1993 in Bangkok, quoted in Bello, Cunningham, and Li (1998), 164.

<sup>146</sup> Prachason (2008), 41.



ethanol and bio-diesel inputs such as sugar cane, cassava and palm oil. Ethanol production has been promoted through many measures, such as machinery and corporate tax exemptions from the Board of Investment (BOI). Exports of ethanol to countries such as Japan, China, and the US are also encouraged by the Thai Ministry of Commerce.<sup>147</sup> Land surrounding ethanol production plants have been purchased by private entities, and local farmers were also encouraged by the state and private sector to grow energy crops.<sup>148</sup> The next subsection discusses linkages between the Thai state and large agri-businesses, which partly help to explain why the Thai state provides agri-food governance structures which are favourable to capital accumulation.

### *Crony capitalism: the Thai state and politically connected agri-businesses*

It has been suggested that policies which subordinate agriculture to industrial needs also selectively benefited Thai urban-industrial interests that had ties to the bureaucracy.<sup>149</sup> This is a reflection of the crony capitalist nature of the Thai state. Through both direct and indirect participations in politics, some large businesses manage to influence policies and state apparatus for their interests. It has been suggested that large agri-businesses in Thailand have built connections with political parties, educational institutions, the bureaucracy, and other prominent institutions in Thailand through financial support and by giving other aids. These businesses, in turn, benefit from state concessions and public research.<sup>150</sup> In addition, it has been

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<sup>147</sup> Department of Industrial Promotion, *A Study of the Feasibility of Ethanol Production from Cassava 2009* (Bangkok: Ministry of Industry, 2009), 10-12. (in Thai)

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>149</sup> Bello, Cunningham and Li (1998), 136.

<sup>150</sup> Lienchamroon (2011), 12-13.

noted that some land grabs by Thai and non-Thai capital receive assistance from local politicians who use their canvassers to help purchase land.<sup>151</sup>

It is common practice for businesses in Thailand to give a lot of financial contributions to help political parties and individual politicians (from all parties) with their election campaigns (and vote buying), so that they can call in favours at later dates.<sup>152</sup> Struggles of (debt-ridden) Thai conglomerates after the 1997 Asian economic crisis, combined with the 1997 Constitution which gave much power to the executive branch, provided conditions for strong alliances of politicians and large business conglomerates which come to assume leading roles in Thai politics.<sup>153</sup> Thaksin Shinawatra, whose business was in the area of telecommunications, was well aware of the benefits of state concessions, and headed the newly established Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party in 1998 which came to power in 2001. Funds to create TRT came from pooled resources of various large capital groups.<sup>154</sup> The party clearly represented the interests of the new urban-based capitalist group, despite having some rural populist policies (discussed below and in following chapters). Bangkok-based business-politicians emerged as the most powerful group of state managers, although provincial business politicians were still able to exert some influence.<sup>155</sup> In 2001, the proportion of members of parliament with business

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<sup>151</sup> Manager Newspaper (Weekly), "Foreign Force's Land Grabs," (2009).

<sup>152</sup> Pricha Oopayokin and Suri Karnchanawong, *Business/tradesmen and Thai Parliamentary System: A Study Funded by the Secretariat of the House of Representatives* (Bangkok, 1999), 263-264. (in Thai)

<sup>153</sup> (Author: this might have changed after the coup d'état in 2006). Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, "The Thaksinization of Thailand" (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) Press, 2005), 215-216. For a study which suggests how the 1997 constitution empowers the executive, particularly the Office of Prime Minister, see Rangsan Thanapornpan, *The Political Economy of the 1997 Constitution* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2003). (in Thai)

<sup>154</sup> McCargo and Pathmanand (2005), 219-220 and 234.

<sup>155</sup> Ukrist Pathmanand, "Globalisation and Democratic Development in Thailand: The New Path of the Military, Private Sector, and Civil Society," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 23, no. 1 (2001), 31.

backgrounds was 30 percent.<sup>156</sup> Thaksin had also appointed businessmen to the boards of government agencies and state enterprises.<sup>157</sup> Not surprisingly, many studies suggest that capital groups associated with politics benefit economically from their direct linkages with the Thai government.<sup>158</sup>

As discussed in the previous part, the CP group is possibly the most influential transnational agri-business based in Thailand. CP has been noted to have strong political linkages with the Thai state since the late 1970s when, for example, CP helped establish relations between Thai and Chinese government leaders, which allowed CP to gain the trust of both the Chinese and Thai governments.<sup>159</sup> CP currently has strong ties with various institutions in Thailand, such as in the bureaucracy and educational institutions. Many key people in these institutions were drawn to work for CP. They also have connections with political parties such as Democrat and Thai Rak Thai. CP's high-ranking managers and some members of their families had been state managers, which might have enabled them to push for favourable policies for CP and agri-businesses.<sup>160</sup> For example, the early Thaksin Cabinet included big business representatives such as Mr. Pitak Intarawitayanunt and Mr. Wattana Muangsuk from the CP group.<sup>161</sup> Other notable CP figures include Dr.

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<sup>156</sup> Kitti Prasertsuk, "From Political Reform and Economic Crisis to Coup D'état in Thailand: The Twists and Turns of the Political Economy, 1997-2006," *Asian Survey* 47, no. 6 (2007), 882.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 888.

<sup>158</sup> For example, see: Ammar Siamwalla, *Politics and Business Interests under the 1997 Constitution: A Complete Report for Prapokplao Foundation* (Bangkok, 2003) (in Thai); Masami Imai, "Mixing Family Business with Politics in Thailand," *Asian Economic Journal* 20, no. 3 (September 2006): 241-256.

<sup>159</sup> McCargo and Pathmanand (2005), 33. In China, the CP group is known as the Chia Tai group (Zheng Da Ji Tuan), which is the first transnational company to invest in China's agribusiness (CP website <<http://www.cpthailand.com/default.aspx?tabid=88>>, retrieved 30 April 2014).

<sup>160</sup> CorpWatch-Thailand, "Connections between CP, Politicians and Thai Bureaucracy," in *CP and Thai Agriculture* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2008), 27-31. (in Thai)

<sup>161</sup> Others include Adisai Bodharamik of the Jasmine Group, Pracha Maleenont from a TV and entertainment conglomerate, and Suriya Jungrungruangkit from the largest local auto parts maker (Thai auto Summit). (Prasertsuk (2007), 881.)

Aarch Taolanont and Dr. Suthat Sriwattanapong.<sup>162</sup> During the first Thaksin administration (2001 to 2005), CP received several tax exemptions from the BOI.<sup>163</sup> Although some studies suggest that CP hybrid rice seeds cannot compete with traditional rice strains, some state offices such as local branches of the Bank of Agriculture and Co-operatives, often encourage farmers to join projects to grow CP hybrid rice seeds.<sup>164</sup> Following the coup d'état in 2014, it seems that CP is still able to maintain good relations with elites on both sides of the political polarisation conflict.<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless, it is too soon to jump to any definite conclusion at the time of writing.

### ***Patron-client relationships***

Patron-client relationships - a historical-cultural legacy of the Sakdina absolute monarchical Thai state - help sustain the crony nature of the Thai state, and help the Thai state to support hegemonic agri-food governance without much resistance from the general population. In a patron-client hierarchy, those higher up in the hierarchy maintain power through the support of those below them. Those lower down in the hierarchy in turn expect tangible benefits from their patrons.<sup>166</sup> Patron-client as a hegemonic mentality in Thai society is discussed in part 3 of this chapter, while this

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<sup>162</sup> Dr. Aarch Taolanont is a high ranking CP manager who was deputy minister of Department of Agriculture and Co-operatives, and played a huge role in pushing for contract farming projects between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos, as well as pushed for tax abolishment of imports from ACMECs contract farming schemes, which aided CP's investment in Indo-china. Suthat Sriwattanapong (former director and deputy director of Thailand Biodiversity Center and BIOTEC, and former vice president of Kasetsart University, Kamphaengsaen campus) who was drawn to work with CP and transnational agri-businesses, such as to push for commercial plantations of GM crops in Thailand. (CorpWatch-Thailand (2008), 35-38.)

<sup>163</sup> For example, an exemption from the payment of import duty on machinery and the exemption from the payment of income tax for certain operations for 5-8 years. (CP Foods, *Kitchen of the World: Annual Report 2003*, quoted in Delforge (2007), 4.)

<sup>164</sup> BioThai, "Report on the Problems of Hybrid Rice Seeds," (2009).

<sup>165</sup> For example: "Prayuth - Yingluck Attended CP Owner's Daughter's Wedding," *Post Today*, November 29, 2014.

<sup>166</sup> Charles F. Keyes, *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State* (Bangkok: Westview Press, 1987), 136.

section focuses on patron-client relations in Thai politics which help to explain the nature of the Thai state and hegemonic agri-food governance structures upheld by the Thai state. It should be noted, however, that patron-client relations are not limited to politics, and can be embedded in other forms of social relations such as in the trading of agri-food production inputs and commodities. As discussed in part 1, there are powerful networks controlling markets of certain fruits and vegetables. Land grabs can also be facilitated through the help of canvassers and their patron-client networks. Moreover, although this sub-section focuses on patron-client relations during electoral democracy periods in Thailand, the thesis recognises that such hierarchical social relations and mentality also play important roles in legitimising and encouraging tolerance of coup d'états (such as in 2006 and 2014), as well as brief periods of military-established governments. However, it is beyond the scope of the thesis to discuss these issues in detail.

Many scholars have discussed the central role of patron-client relationships in Thai politics.<sup>167</sup> Patron-client relationships infer that members are unequal, and hence undermine a democratic principle of equality in Thailand.<sup>168</sup> Many studies have linked patron-client relations with vote buying,<sup>169</sup> where vote buying goes

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<sup>167</sup> For example, see: D. Arghiros, "The Local Dynamics of the 'New Political Economy': A District Business Association and Its Role in Electoral Politics," in *Money and Power in Provincial Thailand*, ed. R. McVey (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2000), 123–53; W. Callahan and Duncan McCargo, "Vote-Buying in Thailand's Northeast: The July 1995 General Election," *Asian Survey* 36, no. 4 (1996): 376–92; M.H. Nelson, "Analyzing Provincial Political Structures in Thailand: Phuak, Trakun, and Hua Khanaen, SEARC Working Paper Series, Hong Kong" (The Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC) of the City University of Hong Kong, 2005), quoted in Elin Bjarnegård, "Who's the Perfect Politician? Clientelism as a Determining Feature of Thai Politics," in *Party Politics in Southeast Asia: Clientelism and Electoral Competition in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines*, ed. Dirk Tomsa and Andreas Ufen (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 145.

<sup>168</sup> Seksan Prasertkul, *Citizen Politics in Thai Democracy* (Bangkok: Amarin, 2005), 10 and 15. (in Thai)

<sup>169</sup> Jeremy Kemp, *Community and State in Modern Thailand (working Paper no.100)*, Southeast Asia program, University of Bielefeld, 1988, quoted in Anek Laothamatat, *Thai Democracy as a Tale of Two Cities: Paths to Reform Politics and Economy for Democracy*, 5th ed. (Bangkok: Wipasa, 2000), 26. (in Thai)

beyond monetary exchanges<sup>170</sup> and can be defined to include many measures that help to sustain patron-client networks. For example, local canvassers may try to provide special development budgets for certain communities or to promise other benefits.<sup>171</sup> Many scholars suggest that, owing to patron-client relations, elections are often seen by Thais as means to support their patrons or leaders to gain national political power. The leaders are then expected to share the spoils of political victory within their patron-client networks, rather than to prioritise national policies that would benefit the whole country.<sup>172</sup> Patronage roles in pre-1990s Thailand were typically filled by state officials, politicians and middlemen.<sup>173</sup> Political parties also reinforce patron-client relationships by selecting candidates based on the criterion that they have large patron-client networks.<sup>174</sup> In recent times, the Thai state under the TRT and Phua Thai administrations provide good examples of the most successful political patron-client networks. TRT and Phua Thai managed to win elections and used state power to benefit their crony capital, while many of their agri-food policies reinforced hierarchical patron-client relations and exacerbated structural problems in the agri-food system, as will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Sombat Jantarawong, *Election Crisis* (Bangkok: Kopfai, 1993), 111-167 and Rangsan Thanapornpan, *Transient Characteristics of Thai Politics* (Bangkok: Manager News Group, 1993), 113-116, quoted in Laothamatat (2000), 26.

<sup>171</sup> For example, see: Prasertkul (2005), 14; Pricha Oopayokin and Suri Karnchanawong, *Business/tradesmen and Thai Parliamentary System: A Study Funded by the Secretariat of the House of Representatives* (Bangkok, 1999), 273 (in Thai); the interview with constituency candidate for the TRT party, Constituency 5, March 2006 (similar views were also put forward by Democrats), and the interview with Director of Provincial Election Commission, Constituency one, May 2006, in Bjarnegård (2013), 148-149, and 158.

<sup>172</sup> For example, see Prasertkul (2005), 17.

<sup>173</sup> Keyes (1987), 136.

<sup>174</sup> Bjarnegård (2013), 142. The study was an in-depth field research (around the year 2006) which focused on campaigns and political networks of the two major Thai political parties (Democrat and Thai Rak Thai).

<sup>175</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker suggest that the TRT populist rural policies can be seen as attempts to replace old local patron-client relationships with direct loyalty to the TRT party. (Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin: the business of politics in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworms Books, 2004), 188-189.). There are also a few studies of the Thai Rak Thai rural development

### *The Crown Property Bureau and the lèse majesté law*

Another notable capital group relevant to the discussion of the agri-food system is the Privy Purse Bureau, which was established in 1890 under the absolute monarchy regime and was later renamed the Crown Property Bureau (CPB).<sup>176</sup> It has been estimated that, in the early 1970s, the CPB's landholdings included almost one-third of pre-war Bangkok, as well as estates in 22 provinces.<sup>177</sup> The CPB has been given some special privileges by the state. For example, the 1948 Crown Property Act absolved the CPB from tax on its income and established the CPB as an absolutely unique entity – as an undefined unit of the Thai state.<sup>178</sup> As of around 2008, the CPB was worth around US\$41 billion.<sup>179</sup> However, the extent of influence and privilege of the CPB beyond this point, as well as its exact relationships with the Thai monarchy, have not been clearly documented. This is perhaps related to the lèse majesté law in Thailand that tends to prevent research and public discussions on the CPB, which is problematic to the study of the agri-food system in Thailand because the CPB owns vast amounts of land and many other businesses.<sup>180</sup> As part 3 discusses, Sakdina or patron-client mentality and royal nationalist sentiments in Thailand also help to limit discussions on the CPB. In effect, such sentiments support the continuing existence of the lèse majesté law and the privileged position of the CPB.

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policies, such as Ammar Siamwalla and Somchai Jitsuchon, *Tackling Poverty: Liberalism, Populism or Welfare State. A Paper Presented at the Annual Thailand Development Research Institute Academic Seminar, 10-11th November 2007* (Cholburi, Thailand, 2007). (in Thai)

<sup>176</sup> Porphant Ouyyanont, "The Crown Property Bureau in Thailand and the Crisis of 1997," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol.38, No.1, February 2008, 166.

<sup>177</sup> *Investor*, February 1971, 124-125 and *Business in Thailand*, February 1973, 20-22, quoted in Phongpaichit and Baker (1995), 282.

<sup>178</sup> Ouyyanont (2008), 171.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

<sup>180</sup> Paisal Sricharatchanya, "Thailand's Crown Property bureau mixes business with social concern," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 30 1988, 140 (26), 61. Estimates have shown that the CPB had direct interests in around 90 companies and indirect interests in another 300 companies. (Ouyyanont (2008), 174.)

## ***2.2) Hegemonic transnational forces' influence on the governance structures***

As discussed in part 1, transnational forces have been instrumental in the shaping of physical infrastructures and hegemonic agri-food production-distribution in Thailand. This section continues to discuss how they have also influenced the hegemonic corporate-led nature of the governance of the agri-food system in Thailand, particularly the governance of trade and intellectual property rights of agri-food products. The thesis recognises that domestic actors do not only support transnational hegemonic forces just because their interests are aligned, but also because they have internalised globalised hegemonic ideologies, such as those based on beliefs in neo-classical/neo-liberal economic principles. However, this issue is discussed in greater detail in part 3 of the chapter.

After the Asian economic crisis of 1997, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed many austerity measures on Thailand as part of the conditions for its loan, resulting in cutbacks of public investments in the agricultural sector, which further reinforced the status of agri-businesses as the "nexus point" between world market and farms.<sup>181</sup> In 1999, the Asian Development Bank (ADB)'s \$300 million loan for agricultural sector restructuring in Thailand, which accounted for 10 percent of the Agriculture Ministry's budget, also included measures explicitly designed to introduce market relations into previously state-subsidised activities, particularly the provision of water resources, which helped to increase the power of agri-businesses in the agri-food system.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Goss and Burch (2001), 981.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 981-982.



Hegemonic domestic and transnational forces often help each other to influence the governance structures of the agri-food system in Thailand, such as by lobbying the Thai state to sign free trade agreements (FTAs) and accept strict property rights regime that, as discussed in part 1, can enhance monopoly controls over seeds. The Thailand Board of Investment (BOI), for example, has been promoting foreign investments in agro-fuels production and other agro-processing industries, especially since 2008. In 2010, as part of the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA) negotiation, BOI suggested that Thailand should remove some fishery, forestry, and plant genetic improvement activities from the sensitive list, allowing foreign investors to invest freely in these areas.<sup>183</sup> This could accelerate the process of accumulation by dispossession such as land grabs and monopoly control over genetic resources.

Representative groups of the Thai population are usually not involved in free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations. The Thai state tends to involve representatives from industries and agri-businesses in FTA negotiations but not farmers.<sup>184</sup> Pressures to sign FTAs with China and the US in the early 2000s, for example, have been argued to come from Thaksin Shinnawatra, the CP group, and other transnational companies.<sup>185</sup> The Thailand-EU FTA negotiations in the early 2010s, which have been criticised for their lack of transparency,<sup>186</sup> put pressures on

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<sup>183</sup> BioThai, Thai life Foundation (RRAFA), and SATHAI, *Public Policies' Implications on Food Security, ASEAN free trade arrangements, and Effects on Farmers, Natural Resources, and the Agricultural Sector* (Bangkok: BioThai, 2009), 9-14. (in Thai)

<sup>184</sup> Prachason (2008) and Thammawit Terd-udomsap, *The Political Economy of Thai FTAs, Research Document 8* (Bangkok, 2008), 140.

<sup>185</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon and Supha Yaimuang, "Alternative Agriculture: From Individual Farmers to Social Movements," in *Reform the Agricultural Sector for Food Security: Analysis and Practical Policies*, ed. Witoon Lienchamroon (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2011), 307-309. (in Thai)

<sup>186</sup> For example, criticisms were made by Assoc. Prof. Dr Jirapon Limpananont, member of the National Economics and Social Development Board (NESDB), quoted in Prachathai news, "NESDB Warns the Government the Unconstitutional Risk of Not Listening to Public Opinions Regarding Thai-EU FTA," January 16, 2013. (in Thai)

Thailand to modify domestic laws to enforce a stricter property rights regime on plant genetic materials, in accordance with the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) of 1991. This means, for example, eliminating a clause on sharing benefits of genetic materials, making it easier for seed and biotechnology companies to patent genetic materials in Thailand. In addition, patent protection might be extended from 12 years to 20 years.<sup>187</sup> A study by FTA Watch (Thailand) suggests that the signing of the Thai-EU FTA, which will force Thailand to accept strict intellectual property regime, is likely to lead to monopoly control of seeds which results in 6 times higher prices, which will cost Thailand 1.4 trillion baht per year (in addition to another 1.2 trillion baht/year cost of medicine). The costs arguably outweigh the benefits of 30 to 40 thousand million baht gained from exporting agri-food products through the EU's generalised system of preferences (GSP),<sup>188</sup> which would be accrued to a few transnational Thai agri-businesses such as CP.<sup>189</sup>

Another good example to demonstrate how the combined power of hegemonic domestic and transnational forces can shape agri-food governance structures to aid capital accumulation, is in the case of the modern retail industry in Thailand. As discussed briefly in the previous section, giant supermarkets in Thailand have adopted commodity standards, management and distribution practices from their transnational non-Thai partners, which affect agri-food chains in Thailand. In addition to that, public governance structures have been lenient to large retail

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<sup>187</sup> BioThai, "Effects of Thai-EU FTA on Plant Genes, Biodiversity, and Food Security," February 26, 2013. (in Thai)

<sup>188</sup> Kannikar Kitwetchakul, FTA Watch (Thailand), quoted in Isra News, "Against Section 190 Modification. NGOs against an Increase in the Power of the Executive - Elites, and a Reduction of Civil Society's Spaces," November 18, 2013. (in Thai)

<sup>189</sup> Post Today Newspaper, "Draft of Thai-EU FTA: Thai Loses More than Gain," December 10, 2012. (in Thai)

transnational capital. As one of the conditions to receive financial aid from the IMF after the Asian economic crisis of 1997, Thailand had to pass the Foreign National Business Act of 1999 which made foreign investments easier in many areas.<sup>190</sup> Transnational companies such as Tesco (UK) and Carrefour (France), with their politically influential Thai capital alliances, became powerful lobbying forces. With help from the Central group, BOI was successfully lobbied to provide investment supports to Carrefour in 1998 despite objections from the Ministry of Commerce.<sup>191</sup> In 2002, an attempt to pass a law to control monopoly power and unfair trade practices was halted after Nevin Chidchop was replaced as Deputy Minister of Commerce by Mr. Wattana Muangsuk, who was married into the Jiarawanont family which owns the CP group.<sup>192</sup> In general, it seems that the Thai state supports vertical integrations along agri-food supply and retail chains. The Thai state does not directly challenge large monopoly transnational capital, but it initiates some secondary policies and supports retail giants' training programmes to help small and medium size Thai retailers to increase their competitiveness.<sup>193</sup>

Overall, this part of the chapter has focused on some important hegemonic agri-food governance structures in Thailand. Additionally, chapter 6 will also discuss hegemonic land governance in Thailand. Underlying these governance structures and hegemonic production-distribution practices are hegemonic ideas, such as beliefs of certain neo-classical economic principles, the inevitability and desirability of Western-style modernisation, as well as patron-client mentality. The following part of the chapter explores such hegemonic ideological order which supports the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand.

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<sup>190</sup> Karnchuchat (2006), 234.

<sup>191</sup> Karnchuchat (2006), 237-238 and Pholnoi (2003), 117.

<sup>192</sup> Pholnoi (2003), 84 and 184.

<sup>193</sup> Karnchuchat (2006), 236 and Pholnoi (2003), 181.

### **Part 3: Hegemonic ideational order of the agri-food system in Thailand**

This part of the chapter discusses the hegemonic ideational order that helps to establish consent and acceptance of the status quo in the agri-food system in Thailand, including even by those who are disadvantaged by established policies. There are many forms of hegemonic ideas in Thai society, but this thesis focuses on important hegemonic ideas relating to the agri-food system that aid capital accumulation, namely those relating to hegemonic transnational neo-liberal and neo-classical economic ideas, as well as more locally specific hegemonic ideas of patron-client and nationalist sentiments.

The hegemonic ideological order of the agri-food system in Thailand is propagated and reproduced by transnational and domestic hegemonic forces through different channels, such as educational institutions and the media. Internalised by the majority of the Thai population, the hegemonic ideational framework creates acceptance which enables the continual existence of the hegemonic agri-food system in Thailand. As pointed out in the Gramscian theoretical perspective in chapter 2, neo-liberal capitalist ideologies can be seen as global hegemonic ideas, often being promoted by political-economic elites in advance capitalist countries as well as other transnational forces, and are mediated through various agencies and channels within specific national-local contexts. Section 3.1 discusses beliefs of certain neo-classical/neo-liberal economic principles in Thailand and of the modernisation development paradigm. Section 3.2 then discusses informal political norms of "Sakdina" or patron-client mentality and some forms of nationalist sentiments in Thailand. Overall, this part of the chapter suggests that the hegemonic ideational

order consists of interactions of such neo-classical/neo-liberal economic ideas and the hegemonic historical-cultural ideas specific to the context of Thailand.

### ***3.1) Neo-classical economics and modernisation***

Part 2 of this chapter has discussed how hegemonic transnational forces have influenced the governance structures of the agri-food system in Thailand. Transnational hegemonic influence, however, also include dissipation and propagation of neo-classical economics and modernisation development ideas in Thai society, which help to establish the population's acceptance of the hegemonic agri-food system. Chapter 2 already discussed, for example, beliefs in the desirability of economic efficiency, specialisation and trade according comparative advantage, and private intellectual property rights. The following paragraphs give some examples of mainstream economics' hegemonic discourses that have been propagated by the mainstream in Thai society, such as by state officials, businesses and academics, which have been internalised by the general population. These discourses establish consent while hiding structural problems in the hegemonic agri-food system in Thailand. This section then discusses hegemonic beliefs in the modernisation development theory and specialised academic disciplines in the Thai context. There might also be some other transnational hegemonic ideas which have been internalised by the general public in Thailand. As chapter 5 will discuss, some people in the sustainable agriculture movement suggest that consumerism and individualism can be seen as part of the hegemonic ideational order. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss them in detail.

Similar to the World Bank's *World Development Report* of 2008 discussed in chapter 2,<sup>194</sup> in Thailand, food-energy scarcity concerns, market mechanisms, and capital's domination over the globalised agri-food system, are often portrayed as win-win opportunities for everyone, even though that is not the case as discussed in previous parts of the chapter. When the production of energy and economic crops are encouraged by the Thai state and agri-businesses to meet industrial and export demands, it is often accompanied by the explanation that these crops fetch higher prices and hence will help to improve economic situations of Thai farmers. For example, high sugar cane and sugar prices in world market in 2009 were presented as a golden opportunity for growers in Thailand.<sup>195</sup> The state's support of the production of ethanol, which is made from cassava and sugar cane, is argued by some state officials and the private sector to be opportunities to improve income levels and economic stability of farmers.<sup>196</sup>

The win-win scenario under the mainstream capitalist agri-food system is doubtful. As part 1 has discussed, higher prices tend to lead to higher supply and future reductions in prices, which might be good from capital accumulation's perspective, but it can be economically destructive to small-scale producers. Moreover, as section 1.4 and part 2 of this chapter have already discussed, there is evidence of monopoly power in the agri-food sector and that some large agri-businesses are aided by the crony capitalist Thai state. The existence of unequal market power relations suggests that competitive efficient markets are mere mythologies of neo-classical economics, and that in reality, win-win situations under

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<sup>194</sup> The World Bank, *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development* (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2007).

<sup>195</sup> Matichon Newspaper, "3 Sugar Plants Associations," (2009).

<sup>196</sup> Department of Industrial Promotion (2009), 15 and Sitiwuth Siempakdee, Vice President of Thai Sugar Miller company, quoted in Matichon Newspaper, "3 Sugar Plants Associations," (2009).

the current mainstream agri-food system are doubtful. Owing to unequal power relations in the agri-food system, large players tend to benefit more from higher prices compare to smaller-scale players, as with the case of rice exports between 2007 and 2008 previously discussed in part 1. There is also a possibility that large agri-businesses can use concerns for global food-fuel "crisis" to gain support for their products. For example, Mr. Thanin Jiarawanont, President of the CP group, has proposed that under the global context of food-energy crisis, Thailand should reduce land for rice production from 62 million rai to 25 million rai, and increase productivity using CP rice seeds to free up land for rubber and palm oil plantations.<sup>197</sup>

As discussed previously, volatile prices in recent years make it difficult for producers to plan their productions and also encouraged financial speculations. Hegemonic neo-classical economic views, however, tend to simply suggest that volatile prices are inevitable outcomes of supply-demand or accept speculations as given. Aside from some short-term government interventions to help stabilise or support prices, hegemonic perspectives suggest that there is unlikely to be alternatives because market mechanisms provide the best and most efficient outcomes. Such discourses also tend not to mention problems of unequal power-relations in the markets and speculations by finance capital, nor mention market governance options. In effect, such discourses, which are often propagated by state officials, private sectors, and academics, help to establish the acceptance of the hegemonic agri-food system.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> BioThai, "Report on the Problems of Hybrid Rice Seeds," (2009).

<sup>198</sup> For example, Dr. Ammar Siamwalla, honorary academic at TDRI, suggested that Thailand's agri-food products are inevitably dependent to global markets and that government interventions, such as those which aim to maintain prices, can only be temporary measures. Such view is not uncommon

The Thai state and the private sector have also used rhetorics of competitive and efficient free markets that benefit everyone to rally the public's acceptance of foreign direct investments in the retail sector, as well as few regulations of large monopoly corporations. Hegemonic arguments in support of retail giants usually refer to their purportedly higher standards which force Thai suppliers to improve, benefits that consumers receive from lower prices, and that there can be "win-win" situations where small and medium size retailers can buy their products from retail giants.<sup>199</sup> A few studies have suggested that such "win-win" situations are doubtful.<sup>200</sup> In addition, these arguments do not address the issues raised in section 1.4 regarding how increased concentration and centralisation of control over retail channels and agri-food supply chains reduce choices and power of both consumers and producers in the longer-run.

Beliefs in market mechanisms and efficiency are also related to the modernisation development worldview, which tends to see development as having linear stages where industrial and service sectors' economic activities are seen as having higher values or as the "next steps" of development compared to agricultural economic activities. Such a view, which is generally internalised by the general population, tends to see it as a desirable progress when more labourers move from the agricultural sector to the industrial sector, even through disposessions by market

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among economists. Nevertheless, Ammar tried to provide a more balance view by suggesting that if Thailand refuses the global markets, there must be clear alternatives which take into account competitiveness as well as global warming. (Siamwalla's speech at "The future of Thai agriculture in the global context", 29-30 August, Mahidol University, Nakhon pratom, Thailand, quoted in Prachathai News, "Ammar's Speech 'The Future of Thai Agriculture Under Changing Circumstances,'" August 29, 2013. (in Thai))

<sup>199</sup> Pholnoi (2003), 96, 133-134 and Manager Newspaper (online), "CP Took over Makro," 2013.

<sup>200</sup> For example, see: Puapongsakorn et al. (2002); The Parliament's Committee of Commerce (2003); and interview with Dusit Nonthanakorn, Vice President of Thai Chamber of Commerce, in Thailand industry news, "The Private Sector Pushes for the Birth of Retail Business Act, Concerns over Foreign Monopoly and Destruction of Traditional Thai Shops," *Thailand Industry News (online)*, June 16, 2008. (in Thai)



forces. In Thailand, it has been suggested that some Thai bureaucrats believe most of the agricultural workforce would eventually be absorbed into the industrial sector if left to market forces, so perhaps they do not feel much need to intervene and to solve problems facing small-scale farmers.<sup>201</sup> The private sector and some academics also help to promote the acceptance of such views; that it is unquestionably normal and desirable for labourers to be moved to the industrial and service sectors. For example, in 2008, Mr. Thanin Jiarawanont of the CP group proposed in a television show that Thailand should reduce farmers to only 1 to 2 percent (author: probably referring to percentage of the labour force or population), while the rest should work in the service sector or in other countries as nurses, cooks and (Thai massage) masseurs.<sup>202</sup> Dr. Viroj Naranong, an economist from Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), also suggests in a public conference in 2013 that Thailand ought to reduce labourers in the agricultural sector, as well as embrace larger-scale plantations and mechanisations to increase productivity to levels similar to developed countries such as the US.<sup>203</sup>

As discussed in previous parts of the chapter, such views promote problematic agri-food production methods. Similar to the position adopted by the World Bank's development report (2008) previously discussed, such views reduce humans to labour commodities that, "rationally" speaking, should be able to move around freely across economic sectors to gain highest returns. However, in reality, farmers often have to move to other economic sectors not by choice, but because they are forced to or are "dispossessed" by hegemonic forces in the agri-food system.

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<sup>201</sup> Interview with an Agriculture and Cooperatives Ministry official, anonymity requested, September 1993, in Bello, Cunningham, and Li (2005), 167.

<sup>202</sup> BioThai, *People's Handbook about Food (in)security and Thailand's Solutions* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2010), 27. (in Thai)

<sup>203</sup> Viroj Naranong's presentation at a public conference: "Rice, Fish, Food: Menu of Inequalities Facing Thai Farmers," 14 January 2013, Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand.

In addition, there are other factors that neo-classical/neo-liberal economic views do not take into account, such as the importance of access to agricultural resources to marginalised people in terms of maintenance of family ties, local and national food security, and other components of quality of life.<sup>204</sup> From a neo-Marxist theoretical perspective, dispossessed farmers can be seen as part of the reserve army of labour which benefits capital accumulation. Overall, it seems that neo-classical/neo-liberal economic views help to legitimise the current hegemonic agri-food system that serves capital accumulation at the expense of nature and labour. To prevent misunderstanding, the thesis would like to emphasise that it does not suggest keeping every farmer and labourer in the agricultural sector, but it tries to expose the inadequacy of hegemonic ideologies, and to find alternatives which increase bargaining power and choices of agricultural producers and rural labourers.

Aside from the widespread acceptance of neo-classical principles in the mainstream economic discipline, the specialisation and compartmentalisation of agricultural production knowledge, which reflects the commodification of nature and natural resources, also underlies industrial/Green Revolution agricultural production methods discussed in section 1.1 of this chapter.<sup>205</sup> It has been suggested that the compartmentalisation of knowledge of agricultural science in Thailand is responsible for the specialised departmental organisational structure of the Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives, and that it is a result of Western/transnational-style educational system that trains people to become specialists in certain agricultural

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<sup>204</sup> Such views are also advanced by farmers and agri-food activists such as Kriskorn Silarak and Ubol Yoowah, quoted during discussions at a public conference: "Rice, Fish, Food: Menu of Inequalities Facing Thai farmers," 14 January 2013, Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand. Chapter 5 will elaborate on this line of critique.

<sup>205</sup> Transfers of specialised/departmentalised Green Revolution production knowledge from Western academics and international organisations are discussed in, for example, Lienchamroon and Thankitchanukit (2008), 38-49.

components or products. The problem is that these specialists tend not to be able to analyse the agri-food production system as part of the socio-ecological system.<sup>206</sup> Such compartmentalised hegemonic knowledge paradigm also plays a part in preventing alternative production methods such as agro-ecology from emerging. In chapter 5, sustainable agricultural production knowledge will be discussed as part of counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand.

### ***3.2) Sakdina patron-client mentality and nationalist sentiments***

This section discusses the deeply rooted Sakdina or patron-client mentality in Thai society, which underlies informal norms of patron-client relations discussed in part 2. It also discusses some forms of nationalist sentiments which have been used to aid capital accumulation through the current agri-food system, particularly royal nationalism and crony capitalist nationalism, which give support to the special status of the Crown Property Bureau and some large Thai agri-businesses. Patron-client mentality and nationalist sentiments are also related to the current polarised political conflict in Thailand, which weakens the strength of counter-hegemonic movements. However, this issue will be discussed in greater detail in following chapters.

Thailand used to be under the rule of the absolute monarchy in which the "Sakdina" system had regulated the social order since the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century. Essentially, the basic hierarchical cleavage in the Sakdina society was between the royalty and aristocracy on the one hand, and the peasantry or "Phrai" on the other.<sup>207</sup> Under this system, there are different hierarchical levels of masters-followers who

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<sup>206</sup> Mr. Chanuan Rattanawaraha, former Deputy Director General of the Department of Agriculture who held a position at the Office of Department of Agriculture (DOA) Technical Advisor at the time of interview, interviewed 17 January 2013, Office of DOA Technical Advisor, Kasetsart University, Thailand. Also, see: Chanuan Rattanawaraha, *Organic Agriculture* (Nonthaburi: Biotech Center, Department of Agriculture, 2007), 220. (in Thai)

<sup>207</sup> Keyes (1987), 135.

were bounded to each other through informal norms and ethical rules, and were expected to fulfill certain obligations according to their social hierarchies. People's mentality and political consciousness were narrowly based on loyalty to groups and individual leaders.<sup>208</sup> Even when the Sakdina and corvee system were abolished, traditional personal linkages between people of different classes persisted as patron-client relationships, as discussed in part 2. The “Sakdina attitude” or patron-client mentality - the consciousness of hierarchical social structures - affect all kinds of social relations in Thai society,<sup>209</sup> and can hinder the development of a more equitable agri-food system in many ways. Notably, the Sakdina attitude has become infused in the working culture of the Thai bureaucracy, as can be seen from top-down nature of rural development and agrarian promotion policies discussed in part 2 of the chapter.

Sakdina influence in Thai society is also reflected in the prominent status of the royal family in contemporary Thailand, as well as the *lèse majesté* law and the special position of the Crown Property Bureau which were discussed in part 2. The majority of the population's loyalty to the King of Thailand are based on various reasons, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to give a complete analysis of the roots of such sentiments. However, there are two notable reasons that are related to the agri-food system in Thailand, which suggest rather contradictory pictures of the Thai monarchy. On the one hand, the importance and popularity of the monarchy in Thailand can be explained as a political construct which started in the 1940s, when the military built up the role of the monarch as the symbolic head of the nation

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<sup>208</sup> Prasertkul (2005), 11-13.

<sup>209</sup> Duncan McCargo, *Politics and the Press in Thailand: Media Machinations* (London: Routledge, 2000), 136, quoted in McCargo and Pathmanand (2005), 173.

through various means.<sup>210</sup> The promotion of royalism in Thailand is arguably not a continuous and consistent process. However, most recently, the coup d'état in 2014 opened up a new opportunity for the military junta to promote royalism agenda in Thailand. On the other hand, as an individual, His Majesty Bhumiphol Adulyadej is widely admired for his various talents (such as in music and engineering) and because he is accepted to have dedicated himself to many development projects to help marginalised people in Thailand.<sup>211</sup> These two reasons (at least partially) help to explain the popularity of the Thai monarchy.

King Bhumiphol has also been instrumental in the promotion of sufficient philosophy and economic ideas that aim to help counter-balance negative effects of the globalised capitalist economy. As the following chapters will discuss, such ideas and philosophy often provide positive inspirations to some people in counter-hegemonic movements in the agri-food system in Thailand, although arguably, such ideas are not without problems. It has also been suggested that King Bhumipol donated 44,000 rai of his own land to small-scale farmers and encouraged the development of rural groups and co-operatives in Thailand.<sup>212</sup> However, the CPB, with its holding of around 30,000 rai of land, is still considered one of the largest landholders in the country.<sup>213</sup> Regardless of the role of King Bhumiphol in rural development, royal nationalism reinforces Sakdina mentality and aids the maintenance of some aspects of hegemonic agri-food governance; in addition to the

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<sup>210</sup> For example, various ceremonies have been used to raise the monarchy's profile. Controls over royal properties were also returned to the monarchy. (Phongpaichit and Baker (1995), 281-282.)

<sup>211</sup> For example, King Bhumiphol has won many awards from various UN agencies, such as the UNDP Human Development Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006.

<sup>212</sup> Weerachai Narkwibulwong, "37 Years of Land Reform and the Adaptation of Sufficiency Economy," in *37 Years of the Agricultural Land Reform Office* (Bangkok: ALRO, 2012). (in Thai)

<sup>213</sup> Prachachat Turakijj, "Famous Business Families Stocking up Land," 2014.

lèse majesté law, loyalty to the King tends to restrain Thais from discussing the power and influence of the CPB.

Nationalist sentiments can also be used to rally public support for Thai capital. For example, the CP group, with the help of the Director-General of the Department of Internal Trade, had used nationalistic sentiments - the fact that CP is a Thai capital group - to gather public tolerance and support for CP's expansion and monopoly power in the retail market.<sup>214</sup> Nevertheless, as previous parts have discussed, Thai transnational capital do not behave that much differently from non-Thai capital with regards to their roles in the agri-food system. It should be noted, however, that aside from such crony capitalist nationalism, there can be other forms of nationalism such as the more radical populist nationalism of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and people's organisations in Thailand.<sup>215</sup>

### ***3.3) The hegemonic ideational order, the Thai state, and consent***

Generally, the Thai state subscribes to the usual modernisation policy prescriptions and neo-classical economic beliefs. Nevertheless, the Thai state hardly promotes textbook-style free competition. Some agri-food policies, for example, have been used to provide special treatments to large capital groups connected to the ruling parties. The cronyist nature of the Thai state can be seen as part of the tendency for capital to try to become larger and more powerful to survive, but in addition to that, patron-client mentality lends a helping hand to support and justify practices of crony capitalism, as well as state policies that benefit large monopoly capital.

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<sup>214</sup> See the interviews in Manager Newspaper (online), "CP Took over Makro," (2013).

<sup>215</sup> Crony capitalist nationalism and a different variant of radical populist nationalism are discussed in Kasian Tejapira, "Post-Crisis Economic Impasse and Political Recovery in Thailand: The Resurgence of Economic Nationalism," *Critical Asian Studies* 34, no. 3 (2002): 323–356.

Thai Rak Thai (TRT) and Phua Thai governments, which have been in power most of the time between 2001 and 2014, provide good examples to illustrate how the hegemonic ideational order influences national agri-food and rural development policies. Political-economic elite groups associate with TRT and Phua Thai are very influential in the agri-food system in Thailand, as discussed in various places of this chapter. Their agri-food policies and capitalist cronyism reflect both hegemonic capitalist/neo-liberal mentality as well as patron-client mentality. On the one hand, TRT under the command of Thaksin Shinnawatra adopted many pro-capital and many seemingly neo-liberal friendly policies such as privatisation and free trade agreements. Thaksin is also known to be a fan of neo-liberal economists such as Hernando de Soto and Michael Porter.<sup>216</sup> On the other hand, TRT and Phua Thai used the power of the Thai state to aid their crony capital groups. Thaksin used his political power to build massive-scale patron-client networks around himself and his allies, which consist of several large business conglomerates, political parties, the National Assembly, the military and the police.<sup>217</sup> Chapter 4 will discuss the TRT's networks and rural policies in greater detail.

This part of the chapter has discussed how the hegemonic ideological order influences national agri-food and rural development policies. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that the hegemonic ideological order's most important function is to help establish consent or acceptance among the Thai population of the hegemonic governance structures and production-distribution practices of the current capitalist agri-food system. As the following chapters will discuss, counter-hegemonic movements in the agri-food system in Thailand have tried to tackle the

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<sup>216</sup> Jim Glassman, "Economic Nationalism in a Post-Nationalist Era: The Political Economy of Economic Policy in Post-Crisis Thailand," *Critical Asian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2004), 59-60, quoted in McCargo and Pathmanand (2005), 181.

<sup>217</sup> McCargo and Pathmanand (2005), 212-215.

hegemonic ideational order, but it is not an easy task. Moreover, there are many forms of co-optation of oppositions that have weakened counter-hegemonic movements.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has advanced the first main argument of the thesis; that the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand has been shaped by transnational and domestic forces to aid capital accumulation, and that the system is sustained through a combination of hegemonic agri-food production-distribution, governance structures and ideational order. The chapter has also helped the thesis to make the first, third and fourth original contributions to knowledge that were outlined in chapter 1, as the following paragraphs elaborate.

First, this chapter has helped the thesis to advance the first original contribution to knowledge by bringing new empirical information from Thailand to existing literature on the corporate agri-food system and agrarian political economy. Through an exploration of the hegemonic agri-food system in Thailand which is operating within the global agri-food system, this chapter has brought interesting insights which are locally distinctive and are globally relevant. For example, the chapter has explored the many ways in which domestic and transnational forces can collaborate to facilitate land grabs in Thailand, such as through the use of nominees. The chapter has also discussed how monopoly power in the agri-food system in Thailand can come in many forms, ranging from formal contract farming to informal monopoly networks. Hegemonic agri-food governance structures and ideational order which are locally specific to Thailand have also been discussed in relation to and as part of the hegemonic global agri-food system. In addition, this chapter's



analysis of the hegemonic agri-food system in Thailand has yielded support to some main arguments in existing agri-food literature, such as regarding negative consequences of excessive financial speculations on agri-food commodities, and negative consequences of the Green Revolution production paradigm.

Second, this chapter has helped the thesis to make the third original contribution to knowledge by extending neo-Marxist and Gramscian theories on the agri-food system. The chapter has used a combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian theory to analyse the hegemonic agri-food system in Thailand as consisting not only of hegemonic production-distribution practices, but also hegemonic governance structures and ideological order. This approach has advantages over purely neo-Marxist perspectives which tend to neglect the roles of ideas and discourses in the hegemonic agri-food system. This chapter has particularly discussed neo-liberal/neo-classical ideologies and the belief in modernisation, which can be seen as transnational hegemonic ideologies, as well as historical-cultural specific hegemonic ideas of patron-client, which help to legitimise and support the hegemonic agri-food system in Thailand.

Third, this chapter has helped the thesis to advance the fourth original contribution to knowledge, which is to provide new perspectives and data on Thai agrarian development. As chapter 1 discussed, there is a need for a more up-to-date study of recent development in the Thai agri-food sector. This chapter has discussed some important contemporary issues in the Thai agri-food system, such as the food-fuel nexus and land grabs. Moreover, this chapter has provided new perspectives on Thai agrarian development, which add to existing literature that tend to focus on domestic factors or adopt mainstream economic theoretical approach. Through the

combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical approach, structural problems in the mainstream Thai agri-food system has been analysed in this chapter as having roots in interconnected ideational and material structures at local, national, and global scales.

In this chapter, the roles of many institutions such as the Thai state and transnational companies have been discussed. However, it should be noted that even though this chapter has discussed some of their actions and discourses as being part of the hegemonic forces, there can be discrepancies and heterogeneities within these institutions which allow room for counter-hegemony or co-optation of oppositions. The next chapter will give an overview of counter-hegemony and co-optation of oppositions in the agri-food system in Thailand. It will also provide a foundation for the discussions of sustainable agriculture and land reform movements in chapters 5 and 6.

## **Chapter 4**

# **Counter-Hegemony and Co-Optation of Oppositions in the Agri-Food System in Thailand**

## **Introduction**

The previous chapter has advanced the first main argument of this thesis, which is that the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand has been shaped to aid capital accumulation by domestic and transnational hegemonic forces. It has pointed out many structural causes which explain the general tendency for small-scale farmers to receive low and uncertain income, and discussed how the hegemonic agri-food production methods have led to many negative ecological and health consequences. This chapter continues the analysis of the agri-food system in Thailand by providing a foundation to discuss the sustainable agriculture movement (SAM) and the land reform movement (LRM) in the following chapters.

This chapter, as well as the following chapters 5 and 6, advance the second and third main arguments of the thesis; that although the mainstream agri-food system is dominated by hegemonic capitalist interests, domestic and transnational counter-hegemonic forces can, to certain extents, influence some changes in the system. As the previous chapter has discussed, the hegemonic structures of the current agri-food system consists not only of production-distribution practices, but of hegemonic ideas and governance structures. The discussion of counter-hegemony, then, should take into account these three dimensions, which is consistent with the Gramscian approach adopted by this thesis where counter-hegemony is conceptualised as practical and ideological challenges to the hegemonic status quo.

In addition to providing an overview of the SAM's and the LRM's counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices and governance structures, this chapter suggests that they can be understood partly as a lineage of past agrarian movements in Thailand, and as part of the Thai civil society's search for alternative development paths. This helps to advance the fourth main argument of the thesis, which is that counter-hegemony should be seen as an un-linear ongoing process over a long period of time, where predominantly counter-hegemonic forces may at times retain some hegemonic elements. This chapter also suggests that polarised political conditions and rural populist policies in Thailand hinder counter-hegemonic efforts of the SAM and the LRM, as well as open room for co-optation of oppositions.

The first part of this chapter briefly discusses the historical development of Thai agrarian movements and the search for alternative development paths. It then provides a comprehensive discussion of counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices, and governance structures of the SAM and the LRM. The discussion also fleshes out how chapters 4, 5 and 6 help the thesis to advance six original contributions to knowledge as outlined in chapter 1. As a foundation for detail explorations of co-optation in chapters 5 and 6, part 2 of this chapter discusses polarised political situations and rural populist policies in Thailand. Part 2 also discusses the paddy pledging scheme as a case study of a policy that strengthens the hegemonic agri-food system, but is being portrayed as counter-hegemonic.

### **Part 1: Counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand**

This part of the chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the SAM and the LRM, which are discussed in detail in chapters 5 and 6. First, section 1.1 briefly situates the SAM and the LRM within the historical development of agrarian

movements in Thailand. In addition, it discusses the influence of popular alternative development ideas, such as that of Thai localism, on both the SAM and the LRM. Other international/transnational sources of inspirations, such as the food sovereignty discourse and practice which influence both the SAM and the LRM, will be discussed in greater detail in chapters 5 and 6. Section 1.2 then discusses main features of the SAM's and the LRM's counter-hegemonic projects, to make salient the interconnections of counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices, and governance structures promoted by the movements.

### ***1.1) Agrarian movements and the search for alternative development paths***

To a certain extent, the SAM and the LRM build themselves on past agrarian movements and alternative development ideas which have achieved some levels of influence in Thai society. The first organised agrarian movement in Thailand was the Peasants' Federation of Thailand (PFT) which was established in November 1974 to protect the interests of farmers.<sup>1</sup> Even though the PFT was violently suppressed in the late 1970s, some of the PFT's ideas and sympathisers survived. Many activists, local leaders, farmers, academics and civil servants who help to advance the SAM's and the LRM's counter-hegemonic projects, were partly involved or were inspired by the PFT and the spirit of activism of that era. Examples include Mr. Rangsan Sansongkwae, who is a farmer leader of Raidong community land title deed project in Lamphun province, and Mr. Boonsong Martkhao from Kammad Organic Agriculture group in Yasothon province.<sup>2</sup> Despite violent repressions, the Thai state

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<sup>1</sup> Kanoksak Kaewthep, "The Struggle of Thai Farmers 1989-1999," in *The Path of Thai Farmers* (Bangkok, 1999), 41-42. (in Thai)

<sup>2</sup> Interviewed 30 October 2012 and 25 December 2012 respectively.

made some attempts to appease the rural population in the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> As chapter 6 will discuss in greater detail, the Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO) was established in 1975 as a response to demands for land reform. Although ALRO has generally been perceived as ineffective in distributing land to small-scale farmers, chapter 6 will suggest that its counter-hegemonic potential should not completely be ruled out. Moreover, community land title deed (CLTD) ideas and practice proposed by the LRM can also be seen as reactions to the limitations of ALRO.

In the 1980s, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their rural development projects were starting to be seen in a better light by the state, and NGOs also started to develop linkages with other sectors such as the media and the middle class.<sup>4</sup> Alternative development ideas were also being developed by activists and public intellectuals such as Niphot Thianwihan, Apichart Thongyu and Bamrung Panya, who were inspired by the importance of community, local wisdom and self-reliance. These trends of thought became known as the "community culture school of thought", and was popularised by a progressive neo-Marxist academic, Chatthip Nartsupha, as well as other Thai academics such as Dr. Prawase Wasi<sup>5</sup> who can be seen as organic intellectuals in a Gramscian sense. Localist ideas are closely associated with concepts of sufficiency, self-reliance, as well as community rights, and have a lot of influence on many Thai NGOs and academics. The concept of "grassroots democracy" which is widely promoted by Thai NGOs, for example, has great resonance with localist ideas. It infers wide-ranging reforms of the bureaucracy

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<sup>3</sup> Pitch Pongsawat, "The Relationship Between the Economic and Political Changes and Farmers Movement in the Present Thai Society: A Critical Observation," *Fah-Diewkan*, Year 1 volume 1, (Jan-April 2005), 67. (in Thai).

<sup>4</sup> Naruemon Thabchumpon, "NGOs and Grassroots Participation in the Political Reform Process," in *Reforming Thai Politics*, ed. Duncan McCargo (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2002), 189.

<sup>5</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand: Economy and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 386-388.

and decentralisation of power to allow local communities and people's organisations to take part in the decision-making process, and to restore their rights to manage local natural resources.<sup>6</sup> Chapter 5 will discuss in greater detail Thai localist ideas and their critiques.

Owing to pressures from NGOs and public intellectuals in the community school of thought, the 1997 and 2007 Constitutions recognise the importance of community rights in the sustainable management of natural resources.<sup>7</sup> However, practical implementation of community rights is very limited.<sup>8</sup> As chapter 6 will discuss in greater detail, the LRM makes use of the Constitution's recognition of community rights to legitimise their counter-hegemonic projects, but the lack of supporting subsidiary laws which support community rights is problematic for the LRM.<sup>9</sup> Chapters 5 and 6 will also discuss in greater detail the influence of Thai localism on the SAM's and LRM's counter-hegemonic ideas and practice. In doing so, they help to advance the fifth contribution to knowledge of this thesis, which is to provide new perspectives on Thai localism; that Thai localism can be seen as a counter-hegemonic national-popular strategy in a Gramscian sense, rather than a conservative appeal to the past as some academic literature suggest. Other sources of counter-hegemonic ideas will also be discussed.

From the late 1980s onwards, conflicts between the locals, the state and capital over use rights of land and other natural resources have intensified.<sup>10</sup> As

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<sup>6</sup> Thapjumphol (2002), 196-197.

<sup>7</sup> Wich Jeerapat, "Reflection on Thai Community Right Ideas," *Julniti Journal (in Thai)* 3, no. 38 (2010), 40. (in Thai)

<sup>8</sup> Chatthip Nartsupha, *Modernisation and the "Community" School of Thought* (Bangkok: Sangsan Publishing, 2010), 160. (in Thai)

<sup>9</sup> For example, see: Ittipol Srisaowalak et al., *A Study Project on the Law to Manage Local Areas* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2001), Abstract page II and III. (in Thai)

<sup>10</sup> Kaewthep (1999), 71-72.

reactions to the problems facing small-scale farmers in the agricultural sector, many grass-root rural organisations emerged in the early 1990s, such as the Small-scale Farmers of the Northeast (So Ko Yo Oo) and the Northern Farmers Network. Through the mid-1990s, rural organisations used protests to attract attention and negotiations to gain concessions from the state. On the International Human Rights day, 10 December 1995, a new umbrella organisation called the Assembly of the Poor was formed in Thailand. It encompassed agricultural groups such as the Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN), which is the core group of the SAM, as well as other marginalised people's groups and their urban middle class allies.<sup>11</sup> Chapter 5 will discuss in greater detail how the Assembly of the Poor's protest allowed the AAN to receive the budget for its pilot programme to promote sustainable agriculture in Thailand. In addition, as chapter 6 will discuss, the Assembly of the Poor and the Northern Peasants Federation are Thai members of La Vía Campesina, and they help to spread transnational counter-hegemonic ideas within their networks.

### ***1.2) Counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution, and governance structures***

This section gives an overview of counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices, and governance structures advocate by the SAM and the LRM, while detail can be found in chapters 5 and 6. The rationale for selecting the SAM and the LRM as examples of counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand was already discussed in chapter 1.

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<sup>11</sup> Chris Baker, "Pluto-Populism: Thaksin and Popular Politics," in *Thailand Beyond the Crisis*, ed. Peter Warr (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 119.



### *An overview of the sustainable agriculture movement (SAM) in Thailand*

As will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 5, SAM groups try to provide alternatives to the mainstream agri-food system and prioritise health, social ties, self-reliance, and ecological sustainability over profit maximisation.<sup>12</sup> SAM's ideas and discourses are also used to build new and more dignified cultural identities for farmers.<sup>13</sup> Some promoters of sustainable agriculture use religion and traditional cultural beliefs to inspire counter-hegemonic ideas and to promote sustainable agriculture, while others prefer transnational ideas and terms such as those from the food security and food sovereignty discourses. Despite strong emphasis on community empowerment and traditional knowledge, SAM members interviewed for this thesis also learn from international experiences such as that of organic farming in Europe, and have also formed transnational trade linkages and other forms of co-operation.<sup>14</sup>

Many forms of sustainable agricultural production methods and alternative market arrangements in Thailand have been developed to reflect such counter-hegemonic ideas. SAM groups promote various forms of sustainable agriculture such as organic agriculture and integrated farming. They aim to preserve bio-diversity and encourages different varieties of agri-food crops to be grown in a farm, partly to

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<sup>12</sup> For example: Mr. Pat Apaimool, a sustainable farmer at Tambol Mae-ta, Chiang Mai, interviewed 1 November 2012; Mr. Pakphum Inpan, a farmer from Natural Farmer group, Tambol Tamor, Surin, interviewed 20 December 2012; Mr. Decha Siripat, founder of Khao Kwan Foundation and the AAN, interviewed 14 October 2012 in Nonthaburi.

<sup>13</sup> Sajin Prachason et al., *Market Options of Farmers: Structural Effects on Unfairness and Benefit Distribution* (Bangkok: BioThai and the Social Research Foundation, Chulalongkorn University, 2012), 232-233; Chalita Bantuwong, "Local Sage: Creation of Identity through Sustainable Agriculture," in *Sustainable Agriculture: Cultural Identity, Agricultural Problems and the Identity of Thai Farmers*, ed. Anusorn Unno (Nonthaburi: Sustainable Agriculture Assembly Committee and Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2004), 238-239. (in Thai)

<sup>14</sup> Mr. Witoon Lienchamroon, BioThai, interviewed 5 April 2012, Nonthaburi; Mr. Ubol Yoowah, NGO activist, interviewed 22 December 2012, Yasothon; Dr. Chomchuan Boonrahong, lecturer at Maejo University, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

reduce economic and food insecurity risks of small-scale farmers; so that they can rely on sales (and personal consumption) of a few crops instead of just one or two crops. Instead of being fixated on only small-scale farms, there are also practical examples of many different sizes of agricultural farms and arrangements, such as organic contract farming, which are accepted as long as they embodied counter-hegemonic principles.<sup>15</sup> In addition, although the capitalist market-led nature of the current agri-food system is criticised, the SAM does not reject the market. Instead, members try to develop market governance mechanisms which are embedded with counter-hegemonic values, such as that of environmental sustainability.

There are many types of distributional channels of sustainable agri-food products in Thailand, ranging from local green markets to large-scale exports of organic and fair trade products. Producers have opportunities to receive higher income and higher bargaining power in these markets. Most groups interviewed try to expand their activities so that members can benefit from value-added opportunities along agri-food chains, as well as from job creations that come with processing and marketing agri-food products.<sup>16</sup> Higher income and job opportunities arising from sustainable agriculture reportedly help to strengthen social ties in some communities.<sup>17</sup> Chapter 5 will draw on experiences of many SAM groups, particularly producer rice mills in Yasothon and Surin provinces. It will also discuss in greater detail current and potential limitations of these alternative production-distribution practices.

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<sup>15</sup> For example, there is an organic contract farming arrangement in Suphanburi, which is a result of collaborations between Khao Kwan Foundation, local rice mills, and local farmers.

<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Supha Yaimuang, president of Sustainable Agriculture Thailand (SATHAI), interviewed 3 October 2012, SATHAI, Nonthaburi.

<sup>17</sup> A few farmers suggest this point, such as Mrs. Kanya Onsri, leader of the organic agriculture group at Tap-tai community, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin and Mr. Arpaporn Krueng-ngern, a young organic farmer in Mae-ta community, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

Aside from formal alternative market governance such as organic labels, some SAM members also recognise the importance of fostering counter-hegemonic individual behaviours and informal social relations to support their sustainable agricultural production and distribution practices.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, as chapter 5 will discuss in greater detail, the Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN) also tries to shape the policy and legal structures governing the agri-food system in Thailand at the local, national and (to a limited extent) global levels, such as those relating to the governance of seeds, intellectual property rights and free trade agreements. Some counter-hegemonic gains were made, but since attempts to challenge policy and legal hegemonic governance structures at the national level often result in limited success, some people in the SAM prefer to concentrate on developing alternative production-distribution practices without much engagement with the Thai state.<sup>19</sup>

### *An overview of the land reform movement (LRM) in Thailand*

The LRM criticises the primacy of private individual rights and are inspired by community rights ideas, particularly the concept of "the complexity of rights" put forward by Anan Ganjanapan from Chiang Mai University. Complexity of rights suggests that different forms of rights can overlap within a geographical unit.<sup>20</sup> For example, one may have an ownership right over a piece of land, but others may benefit from by-products of the land.<sup>21</sup> As chapter 6 will discuss in detail, land

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<sup>18</sup> For example, see: Mr. Arpakorn Krueng-ngern, Mae-ta organic farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai; Prachason et al. (2012), 285.

<sup>19</sup> Such as Mr. Kankamkla Pilanoi, main co-ordinator at the Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>20</sup> Anan Ganjanapan, "Community Rights in Development," in *The Community Dimension: Local Way of Thinking Regarding Rights, Power and Natural Resource Management* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2001), 241 and 243. (in Thai)

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Prayong Doklamyai, "From Discourse to Practical Innovation: Land Reform by Communities. Transcript of the Presentation at a Conference on Anan Ganjanapan's Complexity of Rights, 8 March 2008," in *"I Don't Have the Answer": 60 Years Professor Dr. Anan Ganjanapan*

occupations in the 1990s and early 2000s led to the call for land reform and re-distribution of land to marginalised people in the form of community land title deed (CLTD). CLTD is a form of local governance of land based on democratically formed rules. Generally, members can use individual plots of land for agricultural and housing purposes, but land exchanges are controlled so that, for example, land cannot be sold to people outside of the community for speculation purposes.<sup>22</sup> This general principle is established to prevent land grabs by capital groups and to encourage small-scale farmers' access to land. By encouraging democratic participations, CLTD projects try to encourage the spirit of solidarity and provide counter-hegemonic challenges to hierarchical social structures and mentality in Thailand.

CLTD reflects the complexity of rights concept as land is owned collectively, such as by a co-operative, while individual members receive usage rights over individual plots of land.<sup>23</sup> However, CLTD does not imply giving exclusive rights to local groups. Other parties, such as the state and civil society, can be involved in the governance of local natural resources in a form of checks and balances.<sup>24</sup> Aside from promoting decentralisation of power, social justice, and community rights in the management of natural resources, at the leadership level, the goals of the LRM also include safeguarding agricultural land for domestic food security and the promotion of sustainable agriculture.<sup>25</sup> As chapter 6 will elaborate, counter-hegemonic ideas of

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*and 20 Years of Social Movement on Community Rights and Natural Resources Management* (Chiang Mai: Sustainable Development Foundation, 2008), 251. (in Thai)

<sup>22</sup> Pongthip Samranjit, "A Summary of Research on Ground-up Land Reforms by Communities," July 22, 2011, <<http://www.landreformthai.net>>. (in Thai)

<sup>23</sup> Anan Ganjanapan, lecturer of Sociology and Anthropology, Chiang Mai university, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai; The Land Reform Network, *CLTDs - We Can: a Handbook* (Bangkok: Land Reform Network, 2012), 14 (in Thai); Samranjit (2011).

the LRM also resonate with some academic literature and global counter-hegemonic initiatives.<sup>26</sup> Participations in international conferences organised by La Vía Campesina, as well as exchanges with other civil society groups in Thailand and abroad, also help to promote LRM members' interests in food security and food sovereignty.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, as chapter 6 will discuss, there are still many obstacles in the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices in CLTD projects.<sup>28</sup>

The LRM also recognises that it is important to address macro-level legal and policy governance structures to challenge and transform the hegemonic status quo. In 2014, the LRM started pushing for "four laws for the poor",<sup>29</sup> which include laws regarding land taxation, land bank and community rights in the management of land and natural resource (CLTD law), as well as a law to support the establishment of a Justice Fund for marginalised citizens who need help with their legal fees.<sup>30</sup> As chapter 6 will discuss, limited success by the LRM to challenge the hegemonic legal structure and national policies serve as obstacles which further constrain the potential of existing CLTD projects,<sup>31</sup> and there are also some other potential obstacles. Nevertheless, the chapter will suggest that the counter-hegemonic struggle is still ongoing, and that the LRM should be credited for stimulating debates on equitable distribution and just governance of resources in Thai society.

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<sup>26</sup> For example, see: Olivier De Schutter, "How Not to Think of Land-Grabbing: Three Critiques of Large-Scale Investments in Farmland," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 2 (March 2011), 268-269; Matias E. Margulis, Nora McKeon, and Saturnino M. Borras, "Land Grabbing and Global Governance: Critical Perspectives," *Globalizations* 10, no. 1 (2013), 12.

<sup>27</sup> Mr. Direk Kong-ngern, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>28</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, quoted in Achara Rakyutitham, "Anan's Dynamic: From Culture, Na-Moo to Complexity," in *"I Don't Have the Answer": 60 Years Professor Dr. Anan Ganjanapan and 20 Years of Social Movement on Community Rights and Natural Resources Management* (Chiang Mai: Sustainable Development Foundation, 2008), 250-251 and also see chapter 6.

<sup>29</sup> Drafts of the proposed laws can be found at <<http://www.landwatchthai.com/index.php/th/4>>.

<sup>30</sup> Acharawadee Buaklee, "The North Pushes for 4 Land Laws," *ThaiPBS*, April 04, 2014, <<http://www.citizenthaipbs.net/node/4015>>.

<sup>31</sup> Interviews from community leaders such as Direk Kong-ngern, Montri Bualoi (from Baan Pong, interview date 31 October 2012), Rangsan Sansonkwae and Sangwal Kantham (30 October 2012, Raidong/Mae-aow villages, Lamphun), as well as Mr. Sarawut Wongnikorn, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 30 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

## Part 2: Co-optation of oppositions in the agri-food system in Thailand

There are many forms of opposition and intimidation which discourage counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand. For example, some LRM land occupiers and critics of retail giants have faced legal suits,<sup>32</sup> while the Thai state often tries to discredit and suppress rural social movements.<sup>33</sup> These measures are rather obvious compare to "co-optation of oppositions" - a Gramscian concept which refers to strategies of ideational and practical distortion to subsume and hinder counter-hegemony in the agri-food system. Existing academic literature have suggested many methods of co-optation of oppositions, such as the incorporation of rhetoric of radical change without changing hegemonic principles or substance, as well as the incorporation of leaders and organisations in the decision making process without allowing them to influence the status quo.<sup>34</sup>

This part of the chapter provides an overview of the contemporary political situation in Thailand and possibilities of co-optation of oppositions relating to the SAM and the LRM. Section 2.1 discusses co-optation of agrarian movements through patron-client relations, as well rural populist policies and polarised political discourses, which serve as distortions of counter-hegemony. Section 2.2 then discusses Phua Thai government's paddy pledging scheme as a case study of a rural populist policy. Although it is being presented as a solution, the scheme intensifies and exacerbates structural problems of the agri-food system, and hence can more

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<sup>32</sup> By 2008, Tesco-Lotus had sued four people such as a journalist and an academic for libel (Network of People's Media of the North, "An Open Letter to Thai People Regarding Tesco-Lotus' Encroachment on Free Speech Right," April 20, 2008, <<http://www.tja.or.th>>).

<sup>33</sup> For example, between 1998 and 1999, the second Chuan Leekpai government (Democrat party) had tried to portray rural protesters as development obstructers. Politicians sometimes set up their own people's groups to clash with farmer demonstrators, used the law to arrest the leaders, or paid them off with money. (Kaewthep (1999), 81.)

<sup>34</sup> Bill Paterson, "Trasformismo at the World Trade Organization," in *Gramsci and Global Politics. Hegemony and Resistance*, ed. Mark McNally and John Schwarzmantel (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 47.

appropriately be considered a form of co-optation of oppositions. Chapter 5 will further the discussion by suggesting that the polarised political conflict and accompanying discourses add fuel to the interpretation of Thai localism and sustainable agriculture as being conservative. Moreover, chapter 5 will argue that the paddy pledging scheme hinders the operation of producer rice mills and organic rice production. Chapter 6 will then elaborate, from the perspective of the LRM, how political polarisation in Thailand weakens social movements.<sup>35</sup> Chapters 5 and 6 will also discuss obstacles and potential for co-optation specifically relating to the SAM and the LRM, such as the possibilities of co-optation of sustainable agriculture by the Thai state and businesses, as well as the possibilities of co-optation of CLTD projects through the state's co-operative law.

### ***2.1) Co-optation, rural populist policies and polarised political discourses***

Patron-client relations, discussed as part of the hegemonic agri-food governance structures in the previous chapter, have been used as a tool to co-opt agrarian movements. By providing political patronage and some concessions to selected marginalised population and farmer groups, political economic elites can exert influence over them and control their agenda. It has been noted that in most provinces where there were viable profit-making state promoted co-operatives, local and national politicians were usually behind them as advisers.<sup>36</sup> In addition, many rural leaders and AAN activists point to the prevalence of patron-client relations and co-optation of rural groups by politicians and local notables, such as through offers

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<sup>35</sup> For example: Anan Ganjanapan, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai; Prapart Pintoptang, an academic at the Department of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, interviewed 16 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>36</sup> Nipon Puapongsakorn and Ammar Siamwalla, "Rural Villagers' Economic Group: Success and Survival, 51," in *A Report for the Annual Seminar 1995 of Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), 9-10 December* (Cholburi, Thailand, 1995), 51. (in Thai)

and promises of short-term gains.<sup>37</sup> If agricultural co-operatives and farmers' groups have to rely on patron-client relationships, they may only be able to develop as cases of "special concessions" from the state, and might not seek to expand on their own initiatives or to challenge the hegemonic status quo.

Aside from political patronage, rural populist policies and polarised political discourses are also important forms of co-optation of oppositions that establish Thai Rak Thai and Phua Thai parties, which were in power most of time between 2001 and 2014, as powerful patrons at the national level.<sup>38</sup> Before he came to power, Thai Rak Thai leader Thaksin Shinnawatra had enlisted many activists, academics and local leaders as advisors. However, during the first Thaksin administration, social movements rarely mobilised or were quickly dispersed, while some NGO and academic activists were portrayed as middlemen who exploited poverty.<sup>39</sup> Some activists had also used their grassroots networks to help Thaksin's political party.<sup>40</sup> Many scholars have noted how rural populist policies of the first Thaksin administration (2001 to 2004) reinforced hierarchical patron-client attitude in Thai society.<sup>41</sup> By creating feelings of personal gratitude, rural populist policies manage to bound a lot of Thais to Thaksin Shinnawatra, his family and his political party, as well as encourage them to overlook policies which support and intensify exploitative

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<sup>37</sup> Mr. Praderm Damrong-jaroen, former Farmer Network Party, phone interview on 17 October 2012; Mr. Decha Siripat, founder of Khao Kwan Foundation, 14 October 2012; Mr. Samrueng Roopsuay and Mr. Arunsak Ocharos, veterans in rural social movements from Sri-saket, Northeast of Thailand, interviewed 6 April 2012, Bangkok.

<sup>38</sup> In this thesis, "populist policies" refer to policies which might be popular with the people and may solve short-term problems, but do not solve structural problems.

<sup>39</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon and Supha Yaimuang, "Alternative Agriculture: From Individual Farmers to Social Movements," in *Reform the Agricultural Sector for Food Security: Analysis and Practical Policies*, ed. Witoon Lienchamroon (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2011), 309-311.

<sup>40</sup> Decha Siripat of Khao Kwan Foundation discussed how an activist he used to work with helped Thaksin by using NGOs' long-term connections with rural groups to bring them under Thai Rak Thai's patron-client relation (interviewed 14 October 2012).

<sup>41</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker suggest that the TRT populist rural policies are attempts to replace old local patron-client relationships and transfer the rural people's loyalty directly to the TRT party (Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin: the Business of Politics in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworms Books, 2004), 188-189.).



political-economic structures in the agri-food system. It has been suggested that many farmers and marginalised people feel very defensive of rural populist policies because, for many decades, they have been neglected and weakened by the state. When they gained something from rural populist policies (even short term monetary gains) they felt like they could die for those who came up with such policies, as they never had any political party to depend on before.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, reliance on populist policies can prevent the population from trying to change the system.<sup>43</sup> Grassroots support also allows Thaksin and his allies to expand their political influence and economic control over the Thai economy.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Thaksin, his family and close associates have been accused of many corruption charges and of using political positions to increase the family fortune.<sup>45</sup>

Thaksin and the Thai Rak Thai party encouraged the rural population's dependency on their policies, and tried to establish Thaksin and the party as the biggest patrons of the rural poor. From a quick glance, policies such as the debt moratorium for small-scale farmers and the scheme to provide a one million baht fund for each village, or to give money to rural villages in general, would benefit the rural population such as small-scale farmers. The fine prints, however, often suggest that these policies reinforce hegemonic capitalist agriculture.<sup>46</sup> Phua Thai party, which can be seen as a political successor to the Thai Rak Thai party after it was abolished under court's order, has not departed from such rural/agricultural populist

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<sup>42</sup> Mr. Prapat Panyachatrak, interviewed 29 January 2013, National Farmer Council, Bangkok.

<sup>43</sup> Mr. Witoon Lienchamroon, BioThai Foundation, interviewed 5 April 2012, BioThai headquarter, Nonthaburi.

<sup>44</sup> Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, "The Thaksinization of Thailand" (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) Press, 2005), 217.

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of how Thaksin used his political power to benefit his family's business empire, see chapter 7 "Power and Profit" in Phongpaichit and Baker (2004).

<sup>46</sup> There are quite a few studies of the Thai Rak Thai rural development policies such as Ammar Siamwalla and Somchai Jitsuchon, *Tackling Poverty: Liberalism, Populism or Welfare State. A Paper Presented at the Annual Thailand Development Research Institute Academic Seminar, 10-11th November 2007* (Cholburi, Thailand, 2007). (in Thai)

policies. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss Phua Thai's rural populist policies in detail, but one good example of such policies is the heavily criticised paddy pledging scheme of the Yingluck Shinnawatra's administration (2011 to 2014), which is discussed in the next section.

After the 2006 coup d'etat in Thailand which ousted the second Thaksin administration from power, polarised political conflicts and accompanying discourses in Thailand have escalated and hindered counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand. Contemporary political polarisation in Thailand is often simplified as having two sides; the yellow shirts or the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and more recently (2013 to 2014) the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), versus the red shirts or the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD). PDRC and PAD supporters are often perceived as those who oppose Thaksin Shinnawatra, his family and political party, and are also seen by the red shirts as being pro-monarchy and elitist. UDD supporters, on the other hand, present themselves as those who oppose the military and feudal elites, but they are perceived by others as being pro-Thaksin and pro-Phua Thai. Despite stereotypes, it is not necessary the case that all of those who protest against Phua Thai government are conservative royalists. Many see themselves as activists and reformers, or as socially conscious citizens. Likewise, some people become red shirts not because they support Thaksin but because of other reasons, such as to express their disagreements with coup d'états.

The popularity and legitimacy of Phua Thai's rural populist policies are being supported by discourses which present Phua Thai and red shirt leaders as being on the side of "peasants" or "phrai" who are fighting for marginalised people's causes.

They also claim to be on a mission to defend democracy by eliminating elitist Sakdina or the "ammart" influence in Thai society. Such discourses are propagated by many people such as red shirt leaders, intellectuals, politicians and an international lawyer/lobbyist.<sup>47</sup> The red shirts' claim to represent the peasants, however, is questioned by many Thais as well as some academic literature, which suggest that Thaksin and his associates help to orchestrate and benefit from the red shirts' political mobilisation.<sup>48</sup> The definition of the "ammart" is also problematically vague, and has come to include not only the groups of people directly associated with the monarchy and the 2006 coup d'état, such as the privy council, but also whatever institutions and people (often portrayed as the middle/upper class) that criticise Phua Thai government, including some senators, academics, and the Supreme Court.<sup>49</sup> Even some civil society networks which have built themselves up over the past two to three decades are often dubbed by red shirt intellectuals as being part of the "ammart's network."<sup>50</sup>

Such polarised "phrai" versus "ammart" discourses can be seen as a form of co-optation of oppositions, engineered by political-economic elites to solicit support from the people by directing their attention (and attributing some grievances arising from the hegemonic agri-food system) to the vaguely defined "ammart" class. This helps to mask structural problems of the hegemonic agri-food system, and to distract the public's attention away from the social and ecological threats posed by the

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<sup>47</sup> For example, see Robert Amsterdam, "White Paper: Thailand – The Plot Against Democracy," 18 March 2014 <<http://robertamsterdam.com/thailand/category/red-shirts/>>.

<sup>48</sup> For example, see: Tim Forsyth, "Thailand's Red Shirt Protests: Popular Movement or Dangerous Street Theatre?," *Social Movement Studies* 9, no. 4 (November 2010): 461–467; Yoshinori Nishizaki, "Peasants and the Redshirt Movement in Thailand: Some Dissenting Voices," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 41, no. 1 (January 30, 2014): 1–28; S. Crispin, "Thailand's Classless Conflict," in *Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand*, ed. Michael Montesano (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012), 109, quoted in Nishizaki (2014), 18.

<sup>49</sup> Also see the discussion in Nishizaki (2014), 2.

<sup>50</sup> Prapart Pintoptang, interviewed 16 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

hegemonic agri-food system. Such discourses also undermine counter-hegemonic ideas in the agri-food system and hinder rational debates in Thai society. This is because polarised political discourses often lead to the narrow framing of rural development issues, where rural development is portrayed as having only two opposing paths. Rural populist policies of Thai Rak Thai and Phua Thai parties are generally portrayed by the red shirts as modern globalised choices compare to the backward path of development offered by those who utilise terms associated with Thai localism and the King's sufficiency economy concept, such as community rights and self-reliance. Environmental concerns from increased usage of pesticides to produce rice and other attempts to promote sustainable agriculture are also sometimes ridiculed as middle/upper class elitist concerns.<sup>51</sup> Those who criticise the paddy pledging scheme have been portrayed as being unsympathetic to farmers, while protests and oppositions to Phua Thai government are often portrayed as being motivated by disingenuous political gains. For example, in early 2014, Mrs. Thida Thawornset, president of the UDD, made a statement suggesting that there were some people who pretended to be farmers to encourage other farmers to protests against the Phua Thai government regarding the paddy pledging scheme.<sup>52</sup>

Some people have suggested that electoral results which allowed Thai Rak Thai and Phua Thai parties to come into power serve to legitimise the modern capitalist developmental path and other major policies that these parties pursue. Some have also suggested that this somehow de-legitimises Thai localist alternatives, which are seen as the opposite (anti) development path. An example is

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<sup>51</sup> For example: Nithi Iewsiwong, "Changing Thailand with the Rice Mortgage Scheme," *Mathichon Newspaper*, November 5, 2012; Nithi Iewsiwong, "Changing Thailand with the Rice Mortgage Scheme (One More Time)," *Mathichon Newspaper*, December 3, 2012; Kam Pakha, "Morality Leads Thailand Towards Destruction," *Mathichon (weekly)*, 14-20 January 2011. (in Thai)

<sup>52</sup> Bangkok Business Newspaper, "Thida Condemns Doctors for Joining PDRC," January 21, 2014.

Hall, Hirsch and Li (2011) which portrays the Assembly of the Poor as an advocate of community-based resource management and pitches it against Thaksin and his party's modern capitalist development approach.<sup>53</sup> Since the Shinnawatra's political party received a lot of electoral support from the North and Northeast despite failing to follow through the Assembly of the Poor's demands, the book suggests that this represents a "betrayal" of the Assembly and that the rural population had no objection to capitalism or modernity, nor quarrel with the idea of development.<sup>54</sup>

There are many problems with such an assessment. Some members of the Assembly of the Poor support Thaksin and the red shirts while others do not,<sup>55</sup> not to mention that the Assembly of the Poor does not claim to represent every single individual in rural Thailand. Moreover, aside from issues such as patron-clients and vote buying that distort the principles of electoral democracy, people's decisions to vote for Thai Rak Thai and/or Phua Thai can be based on many reasons e.g. as a second worse choice, because they approve of a few policies, or because of their appreciations of local candidates. In other words, voting for Thai Rak Thai and/or Phua Thai does not necessarily imply complete endorsement of all dimensions and consequences of capitalism and modernity, nor does it imply that voters have critically evaluated the structural problems of capitalism and are ideologically consistent. As chapter 6 will discuss, some members of the LRM sympathise with the red shirts even though they promote community rights to manage local natural

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<sup>53</sup> Derek Hall, Philip Hirsch, and Tania Murray Li, *Powers of Exclusion: Land Dilemmas in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), 187-188.

<sup>54</sup> Andrew Walker, "Beyond the Rural Betrayal: Lessons from the Thaksin Era for the Mekong Region." Paper presented at the International Conference on Critical Transitions in the Mekong Region. Chiang Mai, Thailand, 29-31 January 2007, quoted in Hall, Hirsch, and Li (2011), 188.

<sup>55</sup> Prapart Pintoptang, interviewed 16 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

resources.<sup>56</sup> In addition, both the Democrat (supposedly an elitist "ammart" party) and Phua Thai parties advocated CLTD projects in their 2011 election campaigns.<sup>57</sup> Although Phua Thai party won the election in 2011, the percentage of votes in the 2011 election in the North and Northeast (Phua Thai's stronghold) actually indicates the rural population to be rather politically fragmented. For example, Phua Thai received only 54.9 percent of party-list votes in the North.<sup>58</sup> Overall, it seems that using electoral results to legitimise the modern capitalist development approach is problematic and could consequently serve to benefit elites as well as maintain the capitalist status quo. Chapter 5 will also discuss how the assumption that capitalism and modernity represent "development" is problematic, and can be considered part of the hegemonic ideological order.

Some NGO activists suggest that agrarian social movements have been weakened due to political polarisation, and the lack of unity partly makes large-scale mobilisation difficult.<sup>59</sup> After the coup d'état in 2006, many NGO activists were uncertain about their political beliefs and future strategies, so their counter-hegemonic projects suffered as a consequence.<sup>60</sup> The situation has improved at the time of writing in 2013 and early 2014, but it is still difficult for agrarian social movements to try to expand their networks and alliances without being labelled as either red or yellow. Red shirt intellectuals and supporters sometimes perceive demands by other social movements as "minor", and that Phua Thai party's policies

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<sup>56</sup> For example, as suggested by Baan Pong community leaders, Mr. Direk Kong-ngern and Mr. Montri Bualoi, interviewed 31 October 2012, Baan Pong, Chiang Mai.

<sup>57</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai and P-move declaration 18, 26 April 2013.

<sup>58</sup> For further discussion, see Nishazaki (2014), 5.

<sup>59</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon, interviewed 5 April 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>60</sup> Ms. Switta Teerowattanakul, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

alone should be rather sufficient.<sup>61</sup> Mr. Piroj Polpechr, Secretary of NGO Coordinating Committee on Development (North), sums up the problem quite well when he suggests that NGOs have the tendency to criticise large capital and the capitalist system because they work with local people who are adversely affected by pro-capitalist government policies. Seeing the problems as stemming from the state and capitalism, they cannot put the blame on the "ammart". Nevertheless, because they tend to criticise businessmen, large capital and politicians rather than "ammart", some people think these NGOs have chosen a side in the political conflict<sup>62</sup> and ignore their causes. To make matters worse, hard-core red shirt groups sometimes mobilise to stop other social movement's demonstrations to "defend" Phua Thai government. For example, the Rak Chiang Mai 51 group - a branch of the red shirts - tried to obstruct demonstrations to oppose the 3,500 million baht water management plan at the 2nd Asia-Pacific water summit in Chiang Mai province between 14 and 20 May 2013.<sup>63</sup> In early 2014, some farmers who had not received payment from the paddy pledging scheme for over half a year reported that they were threatened by local red-shirts and community leaders to stop their protests against the government.<sup>64</sup>

The critique of the red shirts movement in this thesis does not intend to suggest that red shirts are fully co-opted or that they completely lack counter-hegemonic potential, because many red shirts might be genuinely interested in bringing about a more egalitarian social order. The thesis also certainly does not

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<sup>61</sup> Prapart Pintoptang, interviewed 16 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>62</sup> Prachatham news, "Piroj Polpechr Investigates the Accusations of 'Kathin', Egoistic Strategy of Thai NGOs and Lack of Unity," February 20, 2013. (in Thai)

<sup>63</sup> Manager Newspaper (online), "Rak Chiang Mai 51 Shows Support to 'Plod' - Threatens NGOs Causing Chaos at the Water Summit - Prepares to Mobilise Thousands to Resist," May 16, 2013. (in Thai)

<sup>64</sup> Bangkok Post (online), "Farmers End Protest in Phitsanulok," January 28, 2014.

suggest that all anti-red shirt groups should be considered as part of counter-hegemony in the agri-food system, because they encompass a variety of groups with different agenda, which are not directly related to agriculture and food. The intention of the critique is mainly to point out that the red shirts movement and its "phrai-ammart" political discourse currently have problematic implications toward counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand. Some anti-red shirt groups can also be as problematic, especially if they refuse to acknowledge inequality in Thai society and blindly accept the domination of other elite groups, as long as they are not from the Shinnawatra family. At the time of writing, the Thai military recently staged the 12th successful coup d'état in Thailand on 22 May 2014 and suspended the 2007 Constitution, so it is unclear how the new development in Thai politics will affect civil society and counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand. Chapter 6 will also discuss some recent developments, as well as how the LRM's campaign is often obstructed by the military after the coup d'état in 2014.

## ***2.2) A case study of the paddy pledging scheme***

This section discusses the paddy pledging scheme as a co-optive populist policy, and focuses on its implementation under Phua Thai government between 2011 and 2014. This scheme is fiercely debated in Thailand due to its massive costs to the government budget, its substantial effects on Thai agri-food chains and rural economy, as well as its political nature. Hence, a discussion of the agri-food system in Thailand would be incomplete without a discussion of the paddy pledging scheme.

While claiming to help farmers, the scheme encourages hegemonic agri-food production and enables large capital to benefit from the government's monopoly control over rice commodity chains. Phua Thai government often argues that it plans



to sell the government stockpiles of rice when international prices are high, suggesting that the government seems to have adopted a speculative mentality similar to finance capital. As this section discusses, the government's plan to speculate with international prices of rice and to benefit from its monopoly control over Thailand's rice supply is problematic. In addition to the fact that it is a massively wasteful drain on the budget, the scheme intensifies problematic industrial production methods, increases power of monopolies and large capital in rice commodity chains, encourages crony and patron-client relationships, and also help to increase the scale of dispossessions of small-scale farmers. Moreover, at the time of writing in early 2014, the Thai National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) is investigating corruption practices in the scheme.<sup>65</sup>

The first paddy pledging programme was introduced in Thailand in the 1981/1982 cropping season to provide soft loans for farmers who wanted to delay sales of their crops. However, since around 2001, the scheme has been used to support price and to increase farmers' income.<sup>66</sup> A study of the paddy pledging programme in year 2005/06 suggests that most of the benefits (55 percent) did not go to farmers, and that the scheme tends to benefit well-to-do farmers in irrigated areas

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<sup>65</sup> For example, see Bangkok Post (online), "NAAC Decides to Impeach Yingluck," May 08, 2014. Some experts on Thai rice production and trade suspect that the government had illegally sold some rice to private bodies at very low prices through politically well-connected agents (Puapongsakorn (2013), 7-15 to 7-21 and doctor Warong Dejkiwikkrom from the Democrat party's information, quoted in Thai Publica (online), "Problems from the Collapse of Paddy Pledging Scheme," June 28, 2013). For other reports of alleged corruption: Bangkok Business Newspaper, "Yingluck Government Lied about G-to-G Rice Deal - Damages to the Budget and Rice Stock," January 17, 2014; David Eimer, "Burmese Smugglers Get Rich on Yingluck Shinawatra's £13 Billion Thai Rice Subsidies," *The Telegraph*, February 04, 2014; Thai Post Newspaper, "Hand over to DSI to Deal with Corruption in Rice Mortgage Scheme. Threaten to Blacklist- Boonsong Organised the Team," February 24, 2012; Patsara Jikkham, "Rice Stockpile to Be Audited," *Bangkok Post (online)*, June 13, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Nipon Puapongsakorn, "The Political Economy of Thai Rice Price and Export Policies in 2007–2008," in *The Rice Crisis Markets, Policies and Food Security*, ed. David Dawe (London-Washington DC: FAO and Earthscan, 2010), 192.

and large-scale exporters.<sup>67</sup> During the global agri-food commodity price spikes of 2007/2008, the Thai government did not sell any portion of its 2.1 million tons of rice stock, but increased the guaranteed price for its paddy pledging programme to a high record of 14,000 baht per ton for the 2008 dry-season crop.<sup>68</sup> This could be because the government wanted to please politically influential farmers and rice millers, or simply because of shortsightedness. The share of pledged paddy in total production then increased dramatically to 44.8 percent for the 2007/2008 dry season paddy, making the government the country's largest trader of rice.<sup>69</sup>

Phua Thai government under the leadership of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinnawatra came into power in August 2011, and continued to support the paddy pledging scheme which offered to buy rice at significantly higher prices than the market. Phua Thai government officials had often explained that they intended to speculate and sell rice in the international market at high prices.<sup>70</sup> The nature of the rice market makes that wish rather impossible, as high prices of rice inevitably tend to increase production in other countries, and as large stockpiles of perishable rice in warehouses keep prices low because buyers rationally expect the Thai government to sell (or to let rice rot).<sup>71</sup> The office of the Ombudsman report in 2014 also suggests

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<sup>67</sup> Nipon Puapongsakorn and Jittakorn Jarupong, *Rent Seeking Activities and The Political Economy of the Paddy Pledging Market Intervention Measures* (Bangkok: Office of the National Anti-Corruption Commission, 2010), Executive Summary (v) and 41. (in Thai)

<sup>68</sup> Puapongsakorn (2010), 191 and 214; Somporn Isawilanont, *Thai Rice: Changes in Production and Distribution Structure* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2010), 66-68. (in Thai)

<sup>69</sup> Puapongsakorn, (2010), 194.

<sup>70</sup> Mr. Kittirat Na-Ranong, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, quoted in Post Today Newspaper, "Expensive Lesson: From Paddy Pledging to Rubber Price Speculations," July 19, 2012. (in Thai)

<sup>71</sup> Post Today Newspaper, "Expensive Lesson", (2012); Nipon Puapongsakorn quoted in Thai Publica (online), "An Interview with Nipon Puapongsakorn, Academic Master on Rice, on Things He Did Not Want to See in Paddy Pledging Scheme and Fear of Politics Destroying the Thai Rice Market," September 21, 2011. (in Thai)

that the scheme is a failure as huge stocks of deteriorating rice are left unsold and the government has to borrow money to pay farmers.<sup>72</sup>

A study of the paddy pledging scheme between October 2011 to October 2012 found that around 52 percent of the country's total rice production was under the control of the government through the pledging scheme. There is evidence that benefits were accrued mostly to middle and high income farmers rather than poor farmers.<sup>73</sup> This could be because, for example, small-scale farmers did not have the means to transport their rice to the mills, so they had to sell to middlemen at lower prices.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, those who benefit most live around irrigated areas which allow them to grow rice several rounds per year, whereas more marginalised farmers in the North and Northeast could only grow rice once a year.<sup>75</sup> Estimated costs of the scheme for the year 2011/2012 alone (without taking into account corruption costs and that rice will be sold at lower prices) is 170,314 million baht, which is a massive drain on the government's budget to the extent that Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) suggests a better option would be to transfer 133,671 million baht of tax payers' money directly to 4 million farming households, so that the government can save 32,169 million baht instead of wasting money on rice pledge costs and on relatively well-off rice mills, warehouses and surveyors.<sup>76</sup> There were also other costs arising from other forms of mismanagement.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Sriracha Jaroenpanich et al., *A Study of the Effects of the Paddy Pledging Scheme on Thai Farmers' Quality of Life* (Bangkok: Office of the Ombudsman Thailand, 2014), (13)-(14).

<sup>73</sup> Nipon Puapongsakorn, *Thai Rice Strategy: Research and Development on Thai Rice and Looking Forward* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2013), 7-1 and 7-4. (in Thai)

<sup>74</sup> Khaosod Newspaper, "Grassroot Voices Regarding the Rice Mortgage Scheme," April 16, 2012. (in Thai)

<sup>75</sup> Jaroenpanich et al. (2014), (9).

<sup>76</sup> Puapongsakorn (2013), 7-6 and 7-7.

<sup>77</sup> Other costs include, for example, degraded rice and loss of Thai export market (*Ibid*, 7-8 and 7-13).

Another main problem of the paddy pledging scheme is that it has increased the monopoly power of large rice mills.<sup>78</sup> A study in 1997 suggests that rice farmers sold paddy through three main channels: 1) local middlemen (50.9 percent); 2) central markets (23.8 percent), and 3) rice mills (19.0 percent).<sup>79</sup> However, since 2004, rice mills became more influential as paddy collectors in the government's paddy pledging scheme. By 2007/2008, 90 percent of paddy was sold to rice mills and most central markets throughout the country had been closed.<sup>80</sup> The rice pledging scheme has also benefited monopolistic large-scale rice mills in particular. Around 53 percent of medium-scale rice mills closed down between 2000 and 2008, while the number of large-scale rice mills increased by 32 percent.<sup>81</sup> The geographical distribution of each rice mill throughout the country allows them to establish "few-buyers" markets where they have monopsony power over rice paddy, especially with the destruction of relatively more competitive central markets which used to be the main trading hubs of paddy.<sup>82</sup> It has also been argued that some rice mills do not use fair and up-to-standard measuring equipments.<sup>83</sup>

Owing to the paddy pledging scheme, Thai rice supply chains have been re-organised to benefit large business groups, and successful rice mills tend to be large ones which have good relations with government officials. Some researchers suggest

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<sup>78</sup> For example, see Jaroenpanich et al. (2014), (3)-(4) and (12)-(13).

<sup>79</sup> Research unit on agri-businesses at Kasetsart University, *Strategic Commodity: Rice Department of Agricultural Economics and Natural Resource* (Kasetsart University, 1997), quoted in Isawilanont (2010), 83.

<sup>80</sup> Isawilanont (2010), 83.

<sup>81</sup> Makasiri Chaowakul, *Revision of Thai Rice Market Structure: A Complete Report for Thailand Research Fund* (Naresuan University, 2009), quoted in Isawilanont (2010), 83.

<sup>82</sup> Isawilanont (2010), 91-92. The author would like to add that the discussion of central markets for paddy, as well as usage of studies from economic perspectives in this part of the thesis, do not intend to suggest that these central markets nor the (appearance of or ideal) "free markets" in the neo-classical economics conception, which are concerned with price competitiveness, are the same as counter-hegemonic markets embedded in counter-hegemonic ideas and governance structures which reflect concerns for social and ecological sustainability.

<sup>83</sup> Chaowakul (2009) quoted in Isawilanont (2010), 92.

that rice traders have to pay agent fees to politically influential agents/companies to purchase rice from the government's stockpile.<sup>84</sup> Former top rice exporting companies of Thailand had to take their business elsewhere, such as to Cambodia.<sup>85</sup> As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5, the scheme has also been criticised for destroying smaller-scale operators along rice supply chains and for discouraging the production of quality and organic rice.<sup>86</sup> Producer rice mills, such as in Tambol Jedihak, Ratchaburi province, which used to mill 100 tons of paddy per month, milled only 10 tons of paddy per month due to the effects of the scheme.<sup>87</sup> Other community enterprises that used to sell rice seeds and other products are also negatively affected.<sup>88</sup>

The paddy pledging scheme exacerbates environmental problems because it encourages the intensification of hegemonic industrial agri-food production methods discussed in chapter 3. Under the paddy pledging scheme, the government buys rice from all farmers without discriminating against low quality (the criteria is based only on the general type of rice, dampness and impurity), so farmers only care about increasing the quantity of paddy in order to increase their revenues. This has pushed them to increase their usage of chemical fertilisers, pesticides, and also to use seeds which have short harvest time that result in lower quality of rice. A lot of farmers tried to intensify their production to increase quantity, such as by harvesting rice 3 to

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<sup>84</sup> For example, see Puapongsakorn (2013), 7-24.

<sup>85</sup> Nipon Puapongsakorn and Ammar Siamwalla, "Transform Thailand with the Paddy Pledging Scheme: Facts for Ajarn Nithi and the Public," published on TDRI website, November 24, 2012. (in Thai)

<sup>86</sup> Based on many interviews with farmers, civil servants, community rice mills managers and NGOs in the AAN such as Ms. Sompoi Jansang, manager of the Rice Fund Surin Organic Agriculture Co-operative, 19 December 2012, Surin, Thailand, and also Jaroenpanich et al. (2014), (4), (12), (14) and 31-32.

<sup>87</sup> Puapongsakorn and Siamwalla (2012).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

5 times a year (instead of just one or two) without resting land,<sup>89</sup> which contributed to serious spreads of aphids.<sup>90</sup>

The paddy pledging scheme also produces a lot of opportunity costs which greatly affect the agri-food system in Thailand. Due to distorted higher prices of rice, a lot of resources have been switched to the production of rice. The costs of production (which were already quite high due to input prices, scarcity of labour, and high fossil fuel prices) increased as a response. There are, for example, reports that some landlords in Ayuthya and Lopburi provinces have increased land rents (50 to 100 percent), stopped renting to landless farmers, or bought up more land as responses to this policy.<sup>91</sup> A study suggests that rent in the Central Region increased from 800 to 1,000 baht per year to 1,000 baht per rai per harvest, and fertiliser costs also increased despite stagnations in the level of yields.<sup>92</sup> There were also over-expansions of rice mill capacity (currently Thailand has 90 million tons per year capacity even though it needs only 35 million tons),<sup>93</sup> not to mention that there are huge opportunity costs of alternative public investments in other socially beneficial projects and infrastructures.<sup>94</sup> The Ombudsman's study in 2014 criticises the paddy pledging scheme for not improving farming productivity, and suggests that the scheme has not helped secure higher farmer's income because of corresponding increases in production costs. Moreover, the scheme cannot provide sufficient income for farmers to purchase important factors of production such as land.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Puapongsakorn (2013), 7-15; Jaroenpanich et al. (2014), (5) and (12).

<sup>90</sup> Puapongsakorn (2013), iv.

<sup>91</sup> Post Today Newspaper, "Farmers Complain to the Government about Exorbitant Land Rents", October 3, 2011, B12. (in Thai)

<sup>92</sup> Puapongsakorn (2013), iv.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 7-14.

<sup>94</sup> Puapongsakorn and Siamwalla (2012).

<sup>95</sup> Jaroenpanich et al. (2014), (7)-(8), (10)-(11) and 30-31.

Landless farmers also have to pay higher land rents and are likely to be transformed into farm labourers with little occupation security.<sup>96</sup>

In early 2014, there were protests in many provinces by farmers who sold their paddy to the government almost half a year ago but had not received payment.<sup>97</sup> The delayed payment caused significant negative repercussions throughout the rural economy and Thai agri-food sector, as purchasing power in rural areas dipped. In mid-February 2014, more than 1 million farmers had not been paid the total value of 130 billion baht for the paddy they pledged to the government.<sup>98</sup> Many farmers had to borrow money through informal channels with high interest rates to invest in a new round of production or just to sustain themselves.<sup>99</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices and governance structures of the SAM and the LRM. It has also discussed the SAM and the LRM as part of the search for alternative development paths in Thailand. This chapter has also discussed co-optation of agrarian movements, as well as how rural populist policies and polarised politics in Thailand open room for co-optation of oppositions. The following chapters will discuss counter-hegemonic attempts of the SAM and the LRM, as well as their obstacles and possibilities of co-optation in greater depth. The chapters will also

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, (9)-(10).

<sup>97</sup> Bangkok Post (online), “Farmers End Protest in Phitsanulok.” (2014) and The Nation (online), “Stress Drives Another Farmer to Suicide,” February 16, 2014.

<sup>98</sup> Pitsinee Jitpleecheep and Piyachart Maikaew, “Delayed Scheme Payments Lead to Higher NPLs,” *Bangkok Post*, February 17, 2014.

<sup>99</sup> For example, see: Post Today Newspaper, “Farmers Complained That Late Payment Made Them Turn to Informal Loans,” January 08, 2014 and Manager Newspaper (online), “Farmers Bittered from Discriminatory Payment as the Government Only Paid Their Supporters,” January 29, 2014. (in Thai)

discuss how the lines between counter-hegemony and co-optation of oppositions can be quite blurred, especially given that predominantly hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces interact, adapt and evolve.

This chapter helps the thesis to advance six original contributions to knowledge which were outlined in chapter 1. Discussions on co-optation of oppositions, rural populist policies, and the paddy pledging scheme, help the thesis to advance the first original contribution to knowledge, which is to bring new empirical information into existing literature on the mainstream agri-food system. An overview of the SAM's and the LRM's counter-hegemonic attempts, as well as the discussion of co-optation of oppositions in part 2, also help to advance the second, third and fourth contributions to knowledge. These contributions include: bringing new empirical information into existing literature on alternative agri-food movements; extending neo-Marxist and Gramscian theories on the analysis of alternative agri-food movements; as well as to provide new perspectives and data on Thai agrarian social movements. The discussion on polarised political discourses as co-optation of oppositions in this chapter also provides new perspectives on polarised politics in Thailand, which is the sixth contribution to knowledge of this thesis. Part 1 of this chapter has also briefly discussed Thai localism, which helps to advance the fifth contribution to knowledge. Nevertheless, chapters 5 and 6 will discuss Thai localism more substantially.



## **Chapter 5**

### **The Sustainable Agriculture Movement in Thailand**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter has provided a comprehensive discussion of counter-hegemony and co-optation of oppositions in the agri-food system in Thailand. This chapter continues the discussion by providing a more in-depth exploration of the sustainable agriculture movement (SAM) in Thailand. It also elaborates on a few issues discussed in chapter 4, and also provides a foundation to discuss the land reform movement in chapter 6.

This chapter helps to support the second and third main arguments of the thesis; that although the mainstream agri-food system is dominated by hegemonic capitalist interests, domestic and transnational counter-hegemonic forces can influence some changes in the system even though they are faced with limitations and co-optation of oppositions. Discussions of counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices, and governance structures of the SAM in Thailand help to advance main arguments of this chapter; that these symbiotic components are all vital integral components of counter-hegemony, and that the Thai SAM can be seen as part of global counter-hegemonic forces in the agri-food system. In addition, this chapter helps to support the fourth main argument of the thesis; that transformations of the agri-food system should be seen as an on-going, non-linear evolutionary process over a long period of time, where counter-hegemonic forces may sometimes retain hegemonic elements or be partially co-opted, which suggests that they should continually refine and develop clear counter-hegemonic ideas and practices.

Empirical exploration of the SAM in Thailand in this chapter also helps to re-affirm the appropriateness of the neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical perspective of the thesis.

This chapter uses secondary sources in English and Thai, as well as interviews of 55 people including farmers, activists, social entrepreneurs and civil servants. Most of them are involved in the SAM in Thailand. Many interviews were drawn from founders of the Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN) - established by NGOs and small-scale farmers in 1989 - as well as other individuals and groups, to give a comprehensive macro-view picture of the SAM in Thailand. As discussed in chapter 1, interviews and site visits for this chapter were based in 4 provinces in 3 regions of Thailand: Bangkok and metropolitan area (Central), Chiang Mai (North), Surin and Yasothon (Northeast). In particular, the focus is on sustainable farmer groups and producer rice mills in Surin and Yasothon provinces. In Yasothon, these groups include Naso Rakthammachart group, Bak-rua rice farmer group, Nam-oom enterprise, Kammad sustainable agriculture group, and Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network. In Surin, the focus is on the Rice Fund Surin Organic Agriculture Co-operative and its members, particularly Tamor, Ta-toom, Taptai and Ta-non sustainable farmer groups. A few interviews were also collected from Mae-ta sustainable agriculture group in Chiang Mai. These four provinces provide good sites for interviews because sustainable agricultural ideas and practice have been developing there for many decades. In addition to the methodology and data collection section in chapter 1, information on farmer groups and sustainable agriculture foundations discussed in this thesis can be found in Appendix 1.

There are four main parts to this chapter. The first three parts discuss the SAM's counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses, production-distribution practices, and governance structures. It should be noted, however, that the order of counter-hegemonic elements to be discussed does not signify varying importance, as they should be seen as integral parts of counter-hegemony. Parts 1 and 3 attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of counter-hegemonic ideas and governance structures of the movement using cross-reference analysis of different farmer groups. Aside from cross-reference analysis of different sustainable farming groups, part 2 explores production and distribution practices of producer rice mills in Yasothon and Surin in greater depth. Part 4 of this chapter then discusses some grey areas between hegemony and counter-hegemony, as well as co-optation of oppositions which are relevant to the SAM.

### **Part 1: Counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses**

This part of the chapter explores counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses of practitioners and supporters of sustainable agriculture in Thailand, such as activists and farmers who are main founders of the AAN, organic farmers and representatives of organic agri-food enterprises, as well as sympathetic civil servants. Section 1.1 discusses how these actors' perceptions of the problems of the mainstream agri-food system are rather similar to the critique of the hegemonic agri-food system provided in chapter 3, although they employ different terms and discourses. Thai and non-Thai sources of counter-hegemonic inspirations are then discussed in section 1.2. Lastly, section 1.3 discusses main counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses of the SAM in Thailand. The discussion helps to suggest that ideas and discourses of the SAM in Thailand may embody some unique local characteristics, but they can also be seen as

part of counter-hegemonic global movements which aim to challenge the global hegemonic agri-food system.

### ***1.1) The SAM's critique of the mainstream agri-food system***

People who are involved in the SAM in Thailand generally criticise negative ecological consequences of the mainstream agri-food system,<sup>1</sup> as well as low nutritional quality and toxin of agri-food products produced in this system.<sup>2</sup> Similar to the critique of the hegemonic agri-food system provided in chapter 3, many people in the movement are concerned about excessive monopoly and political power of large agri-food businesses and retailers, not only in Thailand but also at the global level.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes these critiques arose from personal experience and observation, such as of farmers' health problems arising from excessive usage of agricultural chemicals.<sup>4</sup> Sustainable agriculture supporters in Thailand also criticise what they see as exploitative relations in the agri-food system where farmers lose their control over factors of production and household food security to market forces.<sup>5</sup> Agri-food products under the current hegemonic system are seen as embodiments of exploitation of small-scale farmers. As Dr. Chomchuan Boonrahong, main founder of sustainable agriculture movement based in Chiang Mai described: "Thai consumers are used to buying cheap agri-food products but these cheap prices are

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Samrit Boonsuk, president of the Community of Agro-ecology Foundation, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin; Decha Siripat, "Present and Future of Alternative Farmers in Thailand (first Published in 1987)," in *The Path of Sustainable Agriculture*, 2nd ed. (Samut-Sakorn: BioThai, 2011), 87. (in Thai)

<sup>2</sup> Decha Siripat, "Present and Future of Alternative Farmers in Thailand," (2011), 87.

<sup>3</sup> For example: Mr. Witoon Lienchamroon, BioThai Foundation, interviewed 5 April 2012; Mr. Decha Siripat, Khao Kwan Foundation, interviewed 14 October 2012; Mrs. Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, interviewed 3 October 2012; Mr. Pat Apaimul, Mae-ta organic farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012; Mr. Chanuan Rattanawaraha, Agricultural Advisor Office, Department of Agriculture, interviewed 17 January 2013; Mr. Prapat Panyachatrak, Chairman of National Farmer Council, interviewed 29 January 2013.

<sup>4</sup> For example: Mr. Pakphum Inpan, natural farmer Group in Tambon Tamor, Ampur Prasart, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin; Mr. Thamma Sangkalee and Mr. Bood-dee Piengprom, Ta-toom Natural Farmer group, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>5</sup> Decha Siripat, Khao Kwan Foundation, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

artificial..and are based on the exploitation of farmers' sweat and labour through monopoly power in the markets.<sup>6</sup> Generally, Thai farmers in the mainstream agri-food system are seen as being dependent on "outside forces" or exploitative market relations, which lead to higher costs of production, spending and debt.<sup>7</sup> Due to widespread perceptions that small-scale farmers generally face financial hardships, younger generations of Thais who were born in rural areas tend to seek employment opportunities in other sectors of the economy and in urban areas. This has partially resulted in a higher average age of Thai farmers and a lack of farm labourers.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, rural households in Thailand are generally having what some call "hybrid livelihoods" where they divide their time between farm and non-farm activities.<sup>9</sup>

Sustainable agriculture discourses in Thailand frequently involve criticisms of transnational agri-businesses or large capital's exploitation of farmer, such as through patents of seeds.<sup>10</sup> However, supporters of sustainable agriculture do not simply attribute negative effects of the hegemonic agri-food system to particular companies. Many supporters of sustainable agriculture in Thailand, such as activists, farmers and a developmental monk, explicitly explain the problems as stemming from the globalised capitalist system, as well as the belief in one-track modernisation

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. Chomchuan Boonrahong, lecturer at Mae-Jo University and one of AAN founders, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>7</sup> For example, see: Decha Siripat, "Present and Future of Alternative Farmers in Thailand," (2011), 87.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Weerachai Nakwiboolwong, Director of Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO), quoted in Yupin Pongthong, "Solving Farmers Crisis through Professional Schools in 6 provinces," *Bangkok Business News*, August 11, 2013. (in Thai)

<sup>9</sup> For example, see Jonathan Rigg and Sakunee Nattapoolwat, "Embracing the Global in Thailand: Activism and Pragmatism in an Era of Deagrarianization," *World Development* 29, no. 6 (June 2001): 945–960.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see: Krisda Boonchai et al., *Ideas and Policies Regarding Agri-Food Resource Base* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2007), 25; AAN farmer groups, "Kaen-Nakhon Manifesto: Local Rice, Secure Food and Farmer Livelihoods in E-Saan Local Rice Expo, 14-15 March 2009" (Khonkaen, 2009). (in Thai)

and neo-liberalism<sup>11</sup> which allow large transnational Thai and non-Thai capital to exploit the Earth.<sup>12</sup> Globalised capitalism is also seen as being responsible for hegemonic cultural norms and social relations, such as the "culture of individualism", which prevent people from forming groups to empower themselves.<sup>13</sup>

Mainstream media and educational system are also sometimes criticised for spreading consumeristic way of thinking about food consumption and for changing eating habits, such as by increasing preference for Western fast food rather than more nutritional food. Hegemonic agri-food consumption patterns are also seen as having negative effects on local agri-food systems, leading to destructions of local markets, negligence of traditional crops and reductions of biodiversity.<sup>14</sup> Most importantly, the hegemonic capitalist agri-food system is criticised - often with Buddhist perspectives - for changing world views of farmers and farming practices in general. For example, Mr. Decha Siripat who is a founder of Khao Kwan Foundation discusses how the Green Revolution has changed the minds of Thai farmers who now see "plants merely as products", and select which crop to grow based on monetary gains in robotic and mechanistic manners with no respect to life and Mother Earth.<sup>15</sup> Such agri-food production methods are seen as violent,<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For example, see: Nattapong Pattanapanchai, *Food - Life or Commodity? Marketable Culture under the Control of Corporations*, ed. Ubol Yoo-wah (Nonthaburi: SATHAI, 2008), 40-41 (in Thai); Decha Siripat, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi; AAN farmer Groups, "Kaen-Nakhon Manifesto," (2009); Southern Alternative Farmer Group, "Manifesto of the Southern Alternative Farmer, 6 June 2009" (Patlung, 2009). (in Thai)

<sup>12</sup> Phra Promma Suphatto, a monk at Thamma-ruamjai forest temple, Ampur Pa-tiew, Yasothon, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, interviewed 3 October 2012, Nonthaburi; Dr. Chomchuan Boonrahong, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai; Thamma Sangkalee, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin; Boonsong Martkhao, Kammad Sustainable Agriculture group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>15</sup> Decha Siripat, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi. A few others also explain the problems in similar manners, such as Mr. Adisorn Puangchompoo, main founder of 1 rai-100,000 baht project, interviewed 13 January 2013, Nonthaburi.

greedy, and as lacking in mercy, because farmers do not hesitate to kill "pests" in their farms using agricultural chemicals.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, they tend not to be concerned about toxin residues in agri-food products that harm consumers.<sup>18</sup>

Formal Thai state governance structures have also been criticised by many main supporters of the SAM in Thailand. The Thai state is generally criticised for its fundamental belief in neo-classical economics and its focus on promoting consumerism, as well as the production of cash crops for export and economic growth<sup>19</sup> without much concerns whether small-scale farmers will be in debt or whether prices will plunge downwards due to excessive supply.<sup>20</sup> The Thai state is also criticised for being bias in favour of large-scale enterprises.<sup>21</sup> Many sustainable farmers interviewed criticise some rural populist schemes, particularly the paddy pledging scheme which, as discussed in the previous chapter, supports conventional rice production and hinders sustainable agriculture. Some sustainable farmers view the scheme as the Thai state's attempt to keep farmers and farmer groups weak,<sup>22</sup> and as a method to re-enforce direct patron-client relations between politicians and

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<sup>16</sup> San Saeng-arun Magazine, "In the Water There Are Fishes, in the Paddy Field There Is Rice: Farmer Livelihoods, Disintegration and Survival," *San Saeng-Arun Magazine* (Bangkok, 2012), 24-25. (in Thai)

<sup>17</sup> Decha Siripat, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi and Pat Apaimul, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>18</sup> Mr. Ubol Yoowah, NGO activist based in Yasothon, interviewed 22 December 2012; Mr. Kankamkla Pilanoi, main co-ordinator at the Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>19</sup> Adisorn Puangchompoo, interviewed 13 January 2013, Nonthaburi.

<sup>20</sup> Pat Apaimul, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai; Supha Yaimuang, interviewed 3 October 2012, Nonthaburi; Phra Promma Suphatto, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon; Mr. Jirapan Meesap, Thamma-ruamjai network, interviewed 23 December 2012; Dr. Chomchuan Boonrahong, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai; Mr. Samrit Boonsuk, CAE, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>21</sup> Prapat Panyachatrak, Chairman of National Farmer Council, interviewed 29 January 2013, Bangkok.

<sup>22</sup> For example: Mr. Pakphum Inpan, Mr. Mittr Boontawee, Mr. Som Sadomsuk, Mr. Rungroj Kajadroka and Mr. Samrach Thong-iam, farmer members of the natural farmer Group in Tambon Tamor, Ampur Prasart, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

farmers.<sup>23</sup> Other policies are also criticised for being supportive of problematic production methods, such as policies to provide free agricultural chemicals in some provinces,<sup>24</sup> or are criticised as encouragements for farmers to accumulate debts.<sup>25</sup>

Dissatisfactions with the mainstream agri-food system have led many people to experiment with alternatives. The following section discusses sources of counter-hegemonic ideas for the SAM, such as transnational ideas regarding food security, as well as more regional and domestic sources of ideas.

### ***1.2) The SAM's sources of counter-hegemonic ideas***

Some existing literature have noted that many strands of thoughts such as Buddhism, Christianity, political economy and community culture school, have influenced the SAM in Thailand.<sup>26</sup> This section attempts to give a more up-to-date and comprehensive overview of how the SAM in Thailand has been influenced by many Thai and non-Thai sources of counter-hegemonic ideas. This helps to suggest that although the movement may seem local and national oriented, it is nevertheless part of global counter-hegemonic forces which try to challenge and transform the hegemonic agri-food system.

The Thai SAM's ideas and discourses are quite similar to those in the progressive and radical trends of global agri-food counter-hegemonic movements. Notably, the progressive food justice discourse which supports local or community

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<sup>23</sup> For example, Mr. Rungroj Kajadroka, farmer member of the natural farmer Group in Tambon Tamor, Ampur Prasart, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>24</sup> Mr. Kankamkla Pilanoi, Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>25</sup> Mr. Thamma Sangkalee, Ta-toom Natural Farmer group, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>26</sup> For example, see: Anusorn Unno, *Sustainable Agriculture Movement in Thailand and the Politics of Sustainable Agriculture Narratives* (Nonthaburi: Sustainable Agriculture Foundation Thailand (SATHAI), 2003), 106. (in Thai)



supported agriculture, as well as the more radical concept of food sovereignty which emphasises democratic control over food resource and re-distributive land reforms among other things.<sup>27</sup> Global counter-hegemonic forums, such as the NGO Forum for Food Security in 1996 in Rome, have also produced ideas and concepts that have influenced and helped to legitimise the Thai SAM. Examples include the emphasis on human rights to food, support of decentralised governance structures, and promotion of farmer rights to genetic resources.<sup>28</sup> A manifesto of a sustainable farmer group in Thailand in 2009, for example, utilises similar terms and calls for the state to protect rights of farmers and communities.<sup>29</sup> Global social movements against genetically modified seeds and global social movements' concerns over the WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), have also influenced counter-hegemonic ideas of the SAM in Thailand.<sup>30</sup> Other sources of ideas include the global Occupy movement which inspired the "Occupy Your Life" manifesto of Mekong Youth Alliance for Organic Agriculture and Agro-ecology, which calls on young farmers to reclaim their roles in food production.<sup>31</sup> Thai NGOs and sustainable farmer groups also exchange ideas with civil society groups in other countries through seminars and other forms of collaborations. Examples include La Vía Campesina, an umbrella body that encompasses more than 120 small-scale farmers' and peasants' organisations in 56

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<sup>27</sup> Eric Holt Giménez and Annie Shattuck, "Food Crises, Food Regimes and Food Movements: Rumblings of Reform or Tides of Transformation?," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 1 (January 2011), 125 and 128.

<sup>28</sup> Nora Mckeen, "The FAO, Civil Society and the Global Governance of Food and Agriculture," in *The United Nations and Civil Society: Legitimizing Global Governance - Whose Voice?* (New York: Zed Books, 2009), 36-37.

<sup>29</sup> AAN farmer groups, "Kaen-Nakhon Manifesto: Local Rice, Secure Food and Farmer Livelihoods in E-Saan Local Rice Expo, 14-15 March 2009."

<sup>30</sup> Mrs. Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, interviewed 3 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>31</sup> Mekong Youth Alliance for Organic Agriculture and Agro-ecology, "Occupy Your Life Manifesto," obtained at an academic forum on agro-ecology, farmer rights, food sovereignty and farmer movements, 12 November 2012, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. It is an alliance of young small-scale diversified farmers from various Asian countries namely Bhutan, Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos.

countries such as the Landless Rural Workers Movement in Brasil,<sup>32</sup> Biodiversity for Sustainable Agriculture Asia, Genetic Resources Action International in Spain,<sup>33</sup> fair trade movements in the US<sup>34</sup> and Europe,<sup>35</sup> as well as organic agriculture movements from countries such as Canada, Germany, Philippines and Bhutan.<sup>36</sup>

Many promoters of sustainable agriculture in Thailand utilise counter-hegemonic terms such as farmer rights and food sovereignty in similar manners to transnational social movements based in other countries. However, sustainable agriculture ideas and discourses in Thailand have also been developed further by domestic sources of ideas and by organic intellectuals. Some Thai academics have developed the "food resource base" concept to help promote sustainable agriculture in Thailand, which brings to attention the importance of social and natural foundation of agri-food production and distribution, which should be locally situated and are based on self-reliance, diversity and democratic participation in agri-food governance structures. The concept was developed from many sources of ideas such as food security and food sovereignty, cultural ecology, and human rights<sup>37</sup> but with some differences. For example, the food resource base discourse tries to adopt a different approach from the food sovereignty discourse which focuses on small-scale farmers, to emphasise that the SAM in Thailand ought to build broader cross-class alliances.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Annette Desmarais, *Globalization and the Power of Peasants: La Vía Campesina* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 34.

<sup>33</sup> Mr. Witoon Lienchamroon, BioThai, interviewed 5 April 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>34</sup> Mr. Pakphum Inpan, Tamor Natural Farmer group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>35</sup> Mr. Ubol Yoowah, NGO activist, interviewed 22 December 2012, Yasothon and Green Net Co-operative, "About Green Net Cooperative," accessed July 18, 2014, <<http://www.greenet.or.th/about/greenet>>.

<sup>36</sup> Chomchuan Boonrahong, Mae-Jo University, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>37</sup> Krisda Boonchai et al., *Ideas and Policies Regarding Agri-Food Resource Base* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2007), 23-27. (in Thai)

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

Many Thais from middle class background help to shape ideas and strategies of the SAM in Thailand. Examples include public intellectuals and activists such as Rapee Sakrig, Saneh Jamarik, Prawase Wasi, and Rosana Tosritrakul, as well as green entrepreneurs who founded the Green Net Co-operative, Lemon Farm supermarkets,<sup>39</sup> and green urban consumer networks such as the ones spearheaded by Suan-ngern Meema Publishing. It should be pointed out, however, that the term "middle class" in the Thai context does not have the same connotation as that of 19th century European bourgeoisie because most of the Thai middle class belong to the salariat, while others are small-scale entrepreneurs, academics, or those who work in the media.<sup>40</sup> Some urban-based people also seek sustainable agricultural lessons from foundations such as Khao Kwan, because they want alternatives to office jobs and for ways to live off their own land for the sake of freedom and food security.<sup>41</sup> Some people from the health and medicine professions also help to promote sustainable agriculture.<sup>42</sup>

Many founders of the AAN and sustainable farmer groups are inspired by writings of E.F. Schumacher, Buddhist economics, and ideas regarding small-scale technologies.<sup>43</sup> They are also inspired by Ghandi<sup>44</sup> and natural farming principles of

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<sup>39</sup> Paranat Suksut and Wanna Jarusomboon, "The Identity of Sustainable Agriculture: A Case Study of the Middle Class," in *Sustainable Agriculture: Cultural Identity, Agricultural Problems and the Identity of Thai Farmers*, ed. Anusorn Unno (Nonthaburi: Sustainable Agriculture Assembly Committee and Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2004), 198. (in Thai)

<sup>40</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, "Power in Transition. Thailand in the 1990s.," in *Political Change in Thailand*, ed. Kevin Hewison (London, 1997), 32, quoted in Mogens Buch-Hansen, "Is Sustainable Agriculture in Thailand Feasible?," *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture* 18, no. 2–3 (2001), 144.

<sup>41</sup> Mr. Decha Siripat, Khao Kwan Foundation, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Ms. Pattarawan Jansiri, professional nurse and director at Kamkhuenkaew hospital, helps to promote organic agriculture in Yasothon, interviewed 24 December 2012. Also, many hospitals in Thailand become sites of local green markets. The Thai Health Fund is also supportive of SAM.

<sup>43</sup> For example: Chomchuan Boonrahong, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai; Decha Siripat, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi; Unno (2003), 104. Schumacher's influential book, first published in 1973, is called "*Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered*" and has been translated into Thai.

Masanobu Fukuoka from Japan.<sup>45</sup> Fukuoka's principles of natural farming extend beyond agricultural production to a way of life based on Zen Buddhism. Such principles received a lot of interests in Thai society, particularly from the middle class. Natural farming principles have also inspired the Santi Asoke movement Thailand which engages in sustainable agricultural production in Buddhist communes.<sup>46</sup> In the early 1990s, Fukuoka visited Thailand and inspired many farmers groups such as Naso in Yasothon province.<sup>47</sup> As part 2 of this chapter elaborates, many sustainable production-distribution practices in Thailand are also inspired by the Japanese Tekei system or Community Support Agriculture (CSA)<sup>48</sup> and Effective Micro-organism (EM) soil improvement technology of the Sekai Kyusei Kyo group.<sup>49</sup> Many SAM groups have adapted these ideas and production knowledge further to suit local conditions.<sup>50</sup>

As part of the Thai civil society, counter-hegemonic ideas of the SAM have also been influenced by counter-hegemonic ideas of other social movements, such as anti-capitalist Marxist ideas which were popular among student activists in Thailand in the 1970s<sup>51</sup> and the environmentalism current of other social movements. At times, people organisations' desire to develop sustainable agriculture in their local areas can be seen as manifestations of their disapproval of negative environmental

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<sup>44</sup> Samrit Boonsuk, CAE, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>45</sup> Samrit Boonsuk, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin; Pakphum Inpan, Tamor Natural Farmer group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin; Chomchuan Boonrahong, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>46</sup> Unno (2003), 128.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>48</sup> Chomchuan Boonrahong, Witaya Jantawongsri, and Tassanee Palee, *Appropriate Alternative Markets for Sustainable Agricultural Products* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2000), 14. (in Thai)

<sup>49</sup> Unno (2003), 131; Mr. Kittithanet Rangkaworaset, main founder of 1 rai-100,000 baht project, interviewed 13 January 2013, Nonthaburi.

<sup>50</sup> Mr. Man Samsri, Naso Rice Farmer group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>51</sup> Mr. Boonsong Martkhao, Kammad Sustainable Agriculture group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

effects of industrial development projects that they see in their communities or in other communities, such as in Maptaputh, Rayong province.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, aside from widespread acceptance and usage of transnational counter-hegemonic terms, there are those who prefer to use predominantly local-based concepts in their discourses even though the counter-hegemonic essence, such as that of sustainable agricultural production and empowerment of small-scale farmers, are similar to movements in other countries. As the following paragraphs elaborate, one main source of counter-hegemonic ideas regarding alternative development which has significant impact on Thai civil society and the SAM, is the community culture or localism school of thought. It is infused with Buddhist concepts and is often being associated with King Bhumipol's ideas of sufficiency economy.

Main founder of Thai localism or the community culture school of thought, Chatthip Nartsupha, criticises the capitalist way of thinking associated with consumerism that it is lacking in morality and generosity.<sup>53</sup> He suggests that communities are basic foundations of Thai society, argues for an ideal utopian vision of a society based on generosity within and between communities in contrast to individualistic culture, and proposes a model of national development based on self-reliance and dignity, which he thinks would correspond to the wishes of the people.<sup>54</sup> Chatthip also criticises the view that modernisation has only one path. Rejecting the view that modernisation is the same as Westernisation, he proposes that Thailand ought to find its own path to modernisation. This is to be done not through conservative ideals but through the concept of communities based on generosity,

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<sup>52</sup> Mrs. Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, interviewed 3 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>53</sup> Chatthip Nartsupha and Wanworn Ja-noo, "Editorial," in *Community Culture School of Thought in Thai Society*, ed. Chatthip Nartsupha and Wanworn Ja-noo (Bangkok: Sangsan Publishing, 2012), 10. (in Thai)

<sup>54</sup> Chatthip Nartsupha, *Modernisation and the "Community" School of Thought* (Bangkok: Sangsan Publishing, 2010), 163-165. (in Thai)

where Thailand chooses to embrace only useful aspects of Western modernisation and of other civilisations.<sup>55</sup> Generally speaking, the community culture school of thought can be seen as a strategy to offer a long-term way to integrate everyone into the national and international economy from the bottom up, where communities would build on their own wisdom and resources but not statically and not in isolation, and with help from modern ideas and technology.<sup>56</sup> The state is seen as an agent of capitalism and oppositions to the state can be done through withdrawal into self-reliance or by endeavouring to change the state's character.<sup>57</sup> As section 1.3 discusses, some of the SAM's counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses, such as the focus on building strong self-help groups at local levels, resemble the community culture's ideas and discourses.

Thai localism is also associated with the concept of sufficiency, which has gained more attention after the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and after King Bhumipol's speech of the same year which urged for a sufficient economy.<sup>58</sup> Sufficiency ideas have a foundation in Buddhist philosophy of moderation or the Middle Way.<sup>59</sup> Generally, the core of a sufficiency economy is about moderation, reasonableness and self-immunity, where self-immunity is an ability to cope with shocks using knowledge and integrity.<sup>60</sup> Although they are narrowly perceived as being limited to the King's New Theory of agriculture which emphasises the importance of diversified farms, sufficiency ideas are actually broad ideas that are

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 166-167 and 174, 177.

<sup>56</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit, "Developing Social Alternatives. Walking Backwards into a Khlong," in *Thailand Beyond the Crisis*, ed. Peter Warr (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 138.

<sup>57</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand: Economy and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 388.

<sup>58</sup> Phongpaichit (2005), 162.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Warr, "The Economics of Enough: Thailand's 'Sufficiency Economy' Debate," *International Conference on "Happiness and Public Policy", Organized by PPDO, Prime Minister's Office, UNESCAP, UNCC, Bangkok, 18-19 July 2007* (2007), 8-9.

<sup>60</sup> For example, see UNDP, *Thailand Human Development Report 2007: Sufficiency Economy and Human Development* (Bangkok: UNDP, 2007), quoted in Unger (2009), 143.

applicable to all levels of the economy.<sup>61</sup> When the concept of sufficiency is applied to economic development, a main concern is to be able to cope with possible negative effects of globalisation.<sup>62</sup> Sufficiency economy has also been interpreted as a path towards ecological sustainability.<sup>63</sup> Not all but a few people in the SAM interviewed for this thesis discuss how their experience let them to support sufficiency ideas,<sup>64</sup> or suggest that sufficiency philosophy is compatible with their visions of sustainable agriculture based on self-reliance, diversified farms and local food security.<sup>65</sup>

Thai localist writings often give the impression that their development ideas are inspired by traditional essence of "Thai-ness" which infers a sense of nationalistic exclusivity. As part 4 discusses, this can counter-productively be interpreted as conservative sentiments which are anti-globalisation and are not relevant to the future progress of Thailand. However, it should be pointed out that localist ideas in Thailand resonate with ideas of many people and social movements around the world which try to find paths to alternative globalisation. For example, scholars have used counter-hegemonic localist terms and concepts such as

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<sup>61</sup> Thanwa Jitsanguan, "Sustainable Agricultural Systems for Small-Scale Farmers in Thailand: Implications for the Environment, Paper at Kasetsart University, Bangkok, 12 January 2001," quoted in Unger (2009), 143.

<sup>62</sup> Self-sufficiency Philosophy drafted by King Bhumiphol Adulyadej, for publication by the National Economic Development Board (NESDB) and other agencies in 1999, quoted in Suthep Udomrat, "Self-sufficiency Philosophy," in *Safety and Stability Through Self-sufficiency Economy*, ed. Pitaya Wongkul, Withithat. (Bangkok, 2008), 72. (in Thai)

<sup>63</sup> Saneh Jamarik, "Self-sufficient economy in the globalisation current," in *Safety and stability through self-sufficiency economy*, ed. Pitaya Wongkul (Bangkok: Withithat Institute, 2008), 120. (in Thai)

<sup>64</sup> Pat Apaimul, Mae-ta organic farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai; Kanya Oonsri, village leader and leader of Baan Taptai-Tanon Organic Agriculture group, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin; Adisorn Puangchompoo, 1 rai-100,000 baht project, interviewed 13 January 2013, Nonthaburi.

<sup>65</sup> Mr. Boonsong Martkhao, Kammat Sustainable Agriculture group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

"localization",<sup>66</sup> "eco-localism",<sup>67</sup> and "relocalization"<sup>68</sup> to envision alternatives to capitalist globalisation, not to mention that there are many localist movements around the world.<sup>69</sup> Ideas associated with transnational terms such as "food miles" also support the localism of agri-food production and distribution using environmental reasoning.<sup>70</sup> From this light, localism in Thailand can be seen as more than just isolationist nationalistic ideas, and as part of the global counter-hegemonic trend that tries to transform the hegemonic capitalist system from the ground-up. As for sufficiency economy ideas, they can also alternatively be seen as efforts to localise contemporary norms of a globalised market economy to help marginalised people to cope with economic challenges, similar to some other countries' promotion of thrift, hard work and self-reliant values.<sup>71</sup>

Another problem of Thai localism is that sometimes there is a tendency to insist that ideal local communities governed by co-operation and generosity do (or did) exist in Thailand, rather than to suggest that such an ideal is something to strive toward. Similarly, it has been suggested that the conceptualisation of peasant "communities" in food sovereignty discourse, which suggests that peasant communities embody principles such as co-operation, reciprocity, and egalitarianisms,<sup>72</sup> can potentially be problematic. This is because such conceptualisation obscures contradictions within

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<sup>66</sup> Colin Hines, *Localization: A Global Manifesto* (London: Earthscan, 2000), quoted in Starr and Adams (2003), 22.

<sup>67</sup> Fred Curtis, "Eco-Localism and Sustainability," *Ecological Economics* 46, no. 1 (August 2003): 83–102.

<sup>68</sup> Amory Starr and Jason Adams, "Anti-Globalization: The Global Fight for Local Autonomy," *New Political Science* 25, no. 1 (March 2003): 19–42. Also Tim Lang and Colin Hines, *The New Protectionism: Protecting the Future Against Free Trade* (New York: New Press, 1993), quoted in Starr and Adams (2003), 22.

<sup>69</sup> For examples, see Starr and Adams (2003).

<sup>70</sup> Clare Hinrichs, "The Practice and Politics of Food System Localization," *Journal of Rural Studies* 19, no. 1 (January 2003), 35.

<sup>71</sup> Danny Unger, "Sufficiency Economy and the Bourgeois Virtues," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 36, no. 3 (2009), 140–141.

<sup>72</sup> Henry Bernstein, "Food Sovereignty via the 'peasant Way': A Sceptical View," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 41, no. 6 (January 08, 2014), 1045.



communities, such as with regards to inequality, gender and intergenerational relations.<sup>73</sup> Such potential problems should be guarded against, and many localist scholars have come to recognise such problems. For example, as chapter 6 will discuss in further detail, the conceptualisation of communities in Thailand by Anan Ganjanapan does not insist on intrinsic and static nature of Thai communities.<sup>74</sup>

This section has discussed some important Thai and non-Thai sources of counter-hegemonic ideas of the SAM in Thailand and pointed out its similarities with movements in other countries, which suggest that counter-hegemonic ideas of the sustainable agricultural movement in Thailand are not constrained by local and national contexts, and that the Thai SAM can be seen as part of the global counter-hegemonic forces which try to challenge and transform the mainstream agri-food system. The next section discusses how the SAM draws on these various sources of ideas to build counter-hegemonic ideas regarding alternative agri-food systems.

### ***1.3) Counter-hegemonic ideas of the SAM***

This section aims to give a comprehensive discussion of some of the main ideas and discourses of the SAM in Thailand. Due to the diversity of people and groups in the SAM in Thailand, the thesis is cautious not to engage in over-simplification and generalisation of their counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some unifying goals and values while recognising the diversity of ideas and discourses in the movement. The following paragraphs discuss the movement's visions of alternative production-distribution channels, supporting

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 1046.

<sup>74</sup> For example, see Anan Ganjanapan, "Village in Thai Society: Conceptual Critiques," in *The Community Dimension: Local Way of Thinking Regarding Rights, Power and Natural Resource Management* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2001), 56. (in Thai)

counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses, as well as cultural identity struggles to empower small-scale farmers.

As the name suggests, the SAM in Thailand's main unifying goal is to promote sustainable agricultural production and also to promote more equitable distribution of surpluses through alternative green market arrangements. Part 2 of this chapter discusses different forms of counter-hegemonic production-distribution in greater detail. However, main ideas include using alternative markets to support sustainable agri-food production, as well as to ensure fair economic returns and treatment of producers.<sup>75</sup> Some people in the movement prefer larger-scale trade arrangements as a way to promote sustainable agri-food production,<sup>76</sup> while some people prefer to promote diversified production, local markets and local food security goals compare to longer-distance trading in bulk or export market channels. However, benefits of multi-level market channels are generally recognised.<sup>77</sup> In addition, as the previous section has discussed, there are differences in the SAM's counter-hegemonic terms and discourses. Many groups, such as the BioThai and SATHAI foundations, tend to adopt transnational counter-hegemonic terms such as food security, food sovereignty and farmer rights, and promote them in Thai society. However, there are those who prefer terms and discourses which have more local and cultural appeals. Such differences in discourses have strategic values in enabling the movement to appeal to different groups of people in Thailand. However, depending on the audience, uses of certain terms can create misperceptions and alienate some people from the SAM. Modernist social critiques, for example, are

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<sup>75</sup> Boonrahong, Jantawongsri and Palee (2000), 35-37.

<sup>76</sup> This is usually the approach of social enterprises such as Green Net and export firms.

<sup>77</sup> Sajin Prachason et al., *Market Options of Farmers: Structural Effects on Unfairness and Benefit Distribution* (Bangkok: BioThai and the Social Research Foundation, Chulalongkorn University, 2012), 285; Decha Siripat, "Diversified Farms: Solutions for Farmers (first Published in 1987)," in *The Path of Sustainable Agriculture*, 2nd ed. (Samut-Sakorn: BioThai, 2011), 82. (in Thai)

quick to rail against sustainable farmers who advocate simple self-reliant lifestyles or use Buddhist concepts in their discourses.<sup>78</sup> Despite different ideas and adoption of counter-hegemonic terms, what people in the movement generally agree on is the importance of sustainable agricultural production, supportive and fair market channels, as well as the promotion of partnership producer-consumer social relations and collaboration with other groups in society.

Promoters of sustainable agriculture in Thailand have used the critique of the current system, discussed in section 1.1, as a basis to legitimise their counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses. The concept of "self-reliance", for example, is promoted as a counter-hegemonic concept to challenge farmers' over-dependence on conventional market relations and large-agri-businesses. Self-reliance can be achieved through, for example, practices such as biodiversity preservation, diversified agro-ecological production methods, fair markets,<sup>79</sup> and seed saving.<sup>80</sup> As a response to the commodification of agri-food resources under capitalist agri-food system,<sup>81</sup> some supporters of sustainable agriculture have appealed to traditional Thai beliefs, culture and non-price aspects of agri-food products to aid their counter-hegemonic discourses and the building of producer-consumer relations. For example, Decha Siripat insists that for Thai people, "rice is a core of life, not just food" because it embodies culture, belief system and ecological balance which have been developed

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<sup>78</sup> Kam Pakha, "'Life Must Be Easy' Is Just a Propaganda," *Mathichon Newspaper*, September 18, 2014; Kam Pakha, "Morality Leads Thailand towards Destruction," *Mathichon (weekly)*, January 2011. (in Thai)

<sup>79</sup> AAN farmer groups, "Kaen-Nakhon Manifesto," (2009); Southern Alternative Farmer Group, "Manifesto of the Southern Alternative Farmer," (2009).

<sup>80</sup> Boonsong Martkhao, Kammad Sustainable Agriculture group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>81</sup> Krisda Boonchai et al., (2007), 25.

through many generations.<sup>82</sup> Others also try to promote nutritious and preventive medicinal values of agri-food products.<sup>83</sup>

Discourses which portray farmer consciousness under the hegemonic agri-food system as being greedy and lacking in mercy - sometimes harshly called "the killer consciousness",<sup>84</sup> have also been used as negative contrasts to the main values of sustainable agriculture, which are often based on Buddhist virtues such as generosity.<sup>85</sup> It has been suggested that farmers can practice Buddhist teachings or Dhamma in their everyday lives through sustainable agricultural practices because, for example, they refrain from killing other living beings using pesticides.<sup>86</sup> Not all but many people, such as the Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network discusses in part 2, are inspired by Buddhist teachings to develop their sustainable agricultural practices.<sup>87</sup> In addition, many supporters see sustainable agriculture not only as production methods, but as a way to build new consciousness and mentality<sup>88</sup> to challenge the hegemonic capitalist system and patron-client relations,<sup>89</sup> to give individuals a sense of peacefulness,<sup>90</sup> freedom and independence,<sup>91</sup> as well as to transform society towards a better one that is based on sharing and environmental

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<sup>82</sup> Decha Siripat, Khao Kwan Foundation, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>83</sup> Boonsong Martkhao, Kammad Sustainable Agriculture group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon and Adisorn Puangchompoo, 1 rai-100,000 baht project, interviewed 13 January 2013, Nonthaburi.

<sup>84</sup> Ubol Yoowah, NGO activist, interviewed 22 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>85</sup> Pakphum Inpan, Tamor Natural Farmer group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin and Kittithanet Rangkaworaset, 1 rai-100,000 baht project, interviewed 13 January 2013, Nonthaburi.

<sup>86</sup> Phra Promma Suphatto, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon. Similar views include: Rungroj Kajadroka and Pakphum inpan, Tamor Natural Farmer group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>87</sup> Mr. Nikhom Pechpa, main co-ordinator for the Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network, interviewed 23 December 2013, Yasothon; Mr. Chaluay Kaewkong, quoted in Unno (2003), 118-119; Tamod Farmer group in Pattalung province in the South of Thailand, quoted in Wanna Prayukvong, "A Buddhist Economic Approach to the Development of Community Enterprises: A Case Study from Southern Thailand," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 29 (2005): 1171-1185.

<sup>88</sup> Prachathip Kata, *Civil Society and the Path of Self-Reliance: Lessons from the Organic Agriculture Network in Yasothon* (Bangkok: Society and Health Institute, 2005), 42. (in Thai)

<sup>89</sup> Phra Promma Suphatto, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>90</sup> Unno (2003), 118-119.

<sup>91</sup> Mr. Pat Apaimul, Mae-ta organic farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

sustainability.<sup>92</sup> Some sympathisers of agro-ecology in other countries also have similar ideas and perceive agro-ecology not only as technical production techniques, but also as being related to counter-hegemonic social transformations.<sup>93</sup>

The SAM in Thailand also uses their counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses to engage in cultural identity struggles, where counter-hegemonic images of agriculture and of small-scale farmers are re-constructed to raise their negotiating power and importance. As mentioned briefly in section 1.1, mainstream agricultural activities are hardly desirable for people in rural areas who aspire to earn higher income, so many people seek jobs in other sectors of the economy and migrate. National statistics also seem to support the generally accepted view that income from non-agricultural sources are higher than income from agriculture for an average farming household. In 2012, national average net income from farming of an agricultural household is between 57,400 and 58,600 baht per household per year, which is around 37 to 40 percent of overall household net income between 2008 and 2012.<sup>94</sup> This, adding with Sakdina mentality, partially explain rather wide-spread condescending attitudes toward agriculture and farming as a profession in Thai society. The SAM in Thailand recognises the importance of the agricultural sector beyond monetary contributions, and is generally concerned about food security and the disintegration of social structures in rural communities. Hence, many people in the movement try to challenge condescending attitudes toward agriculture by creating counter-hegemonic images of agriculture and farmers, and by promoting

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<sup>92</sup> Nikhom Pechpa et al., *A Complete Report of the Research Project on the Moral Rice Network* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2009), English and Thai Abstract; Mr. Pakphum Inpan, Tamor Natural Farmer group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>93</sup> For example, see: Steve Gliessman, "Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems Agroecology: Growing the Roots of Resistance," *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* 37, no. 1 (2013): 19–31; Eric Holt-Giménez and Miguel A. Altieri, "Agroecology, Food Sovereignty and the New Green Revolution," *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* 37, no. 1 (September 04, 2013): 90–102.

<sup>94</sup> Office of Agricultural Economics (Thailand), *Basic Information on Agricultural Economics of Thailand 2012* (Bangkok: Office of Agricultural Economics, 2012), 4. (in Thai)

sustainable agricultural production-distribution as one viable solutions to the problems, as the following paragraphs elaborate.

SAM supporters often suggest that sustainable agriculture can help to rejuvenate the agricultural sector and give farmers back their dignity. They point out that the agricultural sector has proven to help alleviate economic problems in time of economic crisis.<sup>95</sup> Agriculture and rural households in Thailand acted as social safety nets for migrated labour forces after the Asian economic crisis of 1997, where a lot of Thai workers who had been laid off returned to their original or familial homes in rural areas.<sup>96</sup> Following the 2008 global financial crisis, a dry-season survey in 2009 by the National Statistical Office found that 74 percent of the most recently migrated rural migrants was to return home.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, sometimes those who work in the cities or other sectors of the economy face forced under-consumption or do not have enough time to raise their children, so they have to send their children to live in the family farms.<sup>98</sup> In these cases, small-scale agriculture seems to be subsidising labour reproduction. Aside from typical seasonal migrants, when agricultural prices are high, some migrants (such as taxi drivers) also return to their rural family farms to help with agricultural production.<sup>99</sup>

The author's interviews of many farmers who are involved in the sustainable agriculture and the land reform movements suggest that sometimes, over a certain age (around 45 years or higher), low-skilled migrant labourers would like to return to

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<sup>95</sup> Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, interviewed 3 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>96</sup> Prayukvong (2005), 1172.

<sup>97</sup> J. W. Huguet, A. Chamrathirong, and K. Richter, "Thailand Migration Profile," in *Thailand Migration Report 2011: Migration for Development in Thailand – Overview and Tools for Policymaker*, ed. J. W. Huguet and A. Chamrathirong (Bangkok: International Organization for Migration, 2012), 7–15, quoted in Rigg, Promphaking and Le Mare (2014), 190.

<sup>98</sup> Adisorn Puangchompoo, founder of the 1 rai -100,000 baht training programme, reflects on how some high school students joined the programme in hope to earn enough income so that their parents can stop working in factories.

<sup>99</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon, BioThai, interviewed 5 April 2012, Nonthaburi.

rural areas and agriculture because their work in the industrial and service sectors were becoming detrimental to their health, or because it was getting difficult to gain employment.<sup>100</sup> There are also other reasons why some rural labourers return to or prefer to work in "lower-income" agricultural-related work. For example, they feel that they have more freedom and that it is important in terms of maintaining healthy family ties.<sup>101</sup> These are perhaps some of the reasons why, as a few studies also suggest, there seems to be continual linkages between Thai rural migrants and rural households.<sup>102</sup> For example, Rigg, Promphaking and Le Mare's (2014) study of three villages in the Northeast found that of all 151 migrants, around 85 percent of migrants had or were expected to return to their villages of origin.<sup>103</sup> The authors also suggest that lingering ties to rural villages compromise migrants' opportunities for upward mobility, and hinder Thailand's ability to move up from a middle-income country to a high-income country.<sup>104</sup> Such view is compatible with some mainstream development perspectives, but it is generally at odds with counter-hegemonic attempts to promote non-monetary values of the agricultural sector and to challenge the capitalist economy as a whole. Promoters of sustainable agriculture in Thailand often voice their concerns over social problems and disintegration of families caused by rural migration.<sup>105</sup> This is a legitimate concern, which is backed up by a study in 2013 which suggests that internal migration where children are left in rural farms

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<sup>100</sup> A few interviewees mention these issues, such as Mr. Jai Kiti, a farmer from Mae-Oaw village, Lamphun, interviewed 30 October 2012 and Mr. Boonlue Jaroenmee, President of Klongyong co-operative, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhon Pratom. They are both farmers in CLTD projects.

<sup>101</sup> Many sustainable farmers suggest this, such as Pakphum Inpan and Samrach Thong-iam, from Tamor Natural Farmer group, interviewed 12 December 2012, Surin. Mr. Samrach, for example, used to work in a factory and in a company before he migrated back after the economic crisis of 1997. He decided to stay on due to relatively higher freedom and independence as a farmer compare to his previous jobs.

<sup>102</sup> M. Amare et al., *Rural–urban Migration and Employment Quality: A Case Study from Thailand*, Economics Working Paper (Manila, 2012), quoted in Jonathan Rigg, Buapun Promphaking, and Ann Le Mare, "Personalizing the Middle-Income Trap: An Inter-Generational Migrant View from Rural Thailand," *World Development* 59 (July 2014), 190.

<sup>103</sup> Rigg, Promphaking and Le Mare (2014), 190.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-196.

<sup>105</sup> Decha Siripat, "Present and Future of Alternative Farmers in Thailand," (2011), 87.

tend to improve economic well-being of households, but there might also be some social and psychological costs to these children.<sup>106</sup>

Many people in the SAM suggest that the knowledge-intensive nature, as well as the social and environmental benefits of sustainable agriculture, can help redeem the dignity of farmers as a profession.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, sustainable agriculture involves transformation of values, world views, livelihoods, and social relations between farmers and other groups in society.<sup>108</sup> The preservation and development of local traditional rice strands by farmers, for example, have been used to build a more confident and dignified identity of farmers.<sup>109</sup> The general public's perception of lowly status of Thai farmers as compare to other professions is problematic, because it is a hegemonic perception that helps to justify the inequitable vertical social relations of patron-client. It has been suggested that if farmers are not confident of themselves, it will be difficult for them to empower themselves and be critical of capitalist agriculture. For example, they will neglect to save seeds of traditional rice strands and opt to purchase seeds from agri-businesses or state institutions.<sup>110</sup>

There are many forms of counter-hegemonic discourses that try to construct a new identity of farmers to challenge the widespread perception that farming is a lowly occupation. For example, the term "local sage" is used to describe successful sustainable farmers who can pass on their production knowledge to other farmers. It

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<sup>106</sup> See Aree Jampaklai et al., *What Happens to Children When Parents Moved Away: CLAIM Project with the Support of UNICEF. Academic Document No. 411* (Nakhon Pratom: Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 2013). (in Thai)

<sup>107</sup> Southern Alternative Farmer Group, "Manifesto of the Southern Alternative Farmer," (2009) and AAN farmer groups, "Kaen-nakhon Manifesto," (2009).

<sup>108</sup> Krisda Boonchai et al., "Introduction," in *Sustainable Agriculture: Cultural Identity, Agricultural Problems and the Identity of Thai Farmers* (Nonthaburi: Sustainable Agriculture Assembly Committee and Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2004), 7–26. (in Thai)

<sup>109</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 232–233.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 283.



is a term constructed to establish a new cultural identity that commands respect and dignity for these farmers, which further supports SAM's cause.<sup>111</sup> However, the term might be partially problematic, as discussed in part 4.<sup>112</sup> Some people in the Thai middle and upper class, including urban farmers and white-collar workers, also help to propagate counter-hegemonic identity of farmers. Some of them have changed their professions to be full-time sustainable farmers and share their stories, using SAM's counter-hegemonic terms and discourses, on many media channels in Thailand.<sup>113</sup> For example, Mr. Wilit Thechapaibul - heir to a famous hotel business - became a critique of the corporate agri-food system and an organic rice farmer who has his own organic shop call Ban-na Wilit in Bangkok. He is also active in promoting organic agriculture as well as in campaigning for the state to solve farmer debt problems.<sup>114</sup> It has been suggested that middle class support of sustainable agriculture can also be seen as a rejection of mainstream middle class identity associated with materialism and consumerism, because embracing the identity associated with sustainable agriculture infers free, independent and self-reliant livelihoods.<sup>115</sup>

Overall, people in the SAM seem to believe in incremental changes over time through dissemination of counter-hegemonic ideas and values, that would not only challenge hegemonic agri-food ideas, but also transform identities, social relations and informal norms. For example, some people point out the importance of

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<sup>111</sup> Chalita Bantuwong, "Local Sage: Creation of Identity through Sustainable Agriculture," in *Sustainable Agriculture: Cultural Identity, Agricultural Problems and the Identity of Thai Farmers*, ed. Anusorn Unno (Nonthaburi: Sustainable Agriculture Assembly Committee and Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2004), 238–239. (in Thai)

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 268.

<sup>113</sup> For example, a female Thai movie star, Oom Siriyakorn, made a television show documenting her learning experience to become an organic rice farmer.

<sup>114</sup> Bangkok Business Newspaper (Jud-prakai section), "Wilit Techapaibul...Revolutionary Farmer," *Bangkok Business News*, August 11, 2008. (in Thai)

<sup>115</sup> Suksut and Jarusomboon, "The Identity of Sustainable Agriculture," (2004), 199.

promoting changes in the pattern of food consumption in favour of sustainable and fair agri-food products,<sup>116</sup> and that a paradigm shift towards sustainable agriculture is not merely a technical issue because it requires a social transformation based on understanding and collaboration between producers and consumers.<sup>117</sup> The movement tries to promote counter-hegemonic ideas through many channels such as books, newspaper articles, television programmes, public seminars, and by holding public events with invited speakers from sustainable agriculture movements in other countries.<sup>118</sup> Thammasart and Sukothai Thammathirat universities have also opened sustainable agriculture courses.<sup>119</sup> Local attempts to spread counter-hegemonic ideas include, for example, the Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network's local radio station which covers areas in 5 provinces (estimated 20,000 people).<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless, it is not always easy to promote counter-hegemonic ideas. Middle class forces in the SAM are sometimes ridiculed or seen as hypocritical,<sup>121</sup> while sustainable farmers are often mocked or seen as crazy by other farmers in their areas.<sup>122</sup> Activists have also suggested that weaning farmers off of agricultural chemicals is a psychological problem comparable to that of weaning off an addiction.<sup>123</sup> Promoters of sustainable agriculture generally recognise that changes in the mainstream agri-food system are likely to be gradual. However, some of them still hope that "crisis points" where

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<sup>116</sup> Krisda Boonchai et al, (2007), 25; Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, interviewed 3 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>117</sup> Chomchuan Boonrahong, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>118</sup> For example, see Suan-ngern mee-ma's website: <<http://www.suan-spirit.com/>>.

<sup>119</sup> Chanuan Rattanawaraha, *Organic Agriculture* (Nonthaburi: Biotech Center, Department of Agriculture, 2007), 65. (in Thai)

<sup>120</sup> Nikhom Pechpa, Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network, interviewed 23 December 2013, Yasothon.

<sup>121</sup> Inferred from responses of Witoon Lienchamroom regarding the perceptions of seminar participants on Oom Siriyakorn's organic farming TV show, quoted in Arreerat Panjab, "Notes from the Seminar on 8 July 2011, Thammasart University," *Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 30, no. 2 (2011), 183. (in Thai)

<sup>122</sup> Ms. Sompoi Jansang, Manager of the Rice Fund Surin Organic Agriculture Co-operative Ltd, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin. Mr. Pakphum Inpan, Tamor Natural Farmer group, Surin.; Mr. Thamma Sangkalee, Ta-toom Natural Farmer group, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin; Mr. Vitoon Panyakul, main founder of Green Net Co-operative, interviewed 23 January 2013, Bangkok.

<sup>123</sup> Decha Siripat, Khao Kwan Foundation, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi and Samrit Boonsuk, President of CAE, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin.

structural problems of the hegemonic agri-food system become more salient, such as environmental crises owing to intensive industrial agricultural production or deep plunges of cash crop prices following free trade arrangements, will serve as catalysts to expand the support base for sustainable agriculture in Thailand.<sup>124</sup>

It is important to point out that counter-hegemonic ideas discussed in this part of the chapter are not problems-free. Since the ideas are rather broad, there can be different interpretations and corresponding practices, as well as room for co-optation of oppositions, as part 4 discusses in greater detail. The next part of the chapter discusses counter-hegemonic production-distribution practices developed by the SAM. It should be emphasised, however, that the realms of counter-hegemonic ideas and practice are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they seem to have evolved together as counter-hegemonic forces accumulate their experience. For example, successful sustainable farms re-affirm farmers' beliefs in agro-ecology based on sharing and natural balance. As the next chapter explores in greater depth, many people in the SAM have also come to believe, through experience, that land redistribution and progressive taxation of land are necessary to promote sustainable agriculture.<sup>125</sup>

## **Part 2: Counter-hegemonic production-distribution practices**

This part of the chapter explores many forms of production, processing and distribution of sustainable agri-food products in Thailand, as well as evaluate their counter-hegemonic potential. Section 2.1 discusses sustainable agricultural production, while section 2.2 discusses the processing and retailing of sustainable

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<sup>124</sup> Mr. Sittiporn Bangkaew, Director of the Office of Commercial Affairs in Surin, interviewed 21 December 2012, Surin and Decha Siripat, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>125</sup> Decha Siripat, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

agri-food products in Thailand. Section 2.3 then focuses on producer rice mills and sustainable farmer groups in Surin and Yasothon. Lastly, section 2.4 evaluates counter-hegemonic potential and current problems of sustainable agricultural practices in Thailand.

### ***2.1) Sustainable agricultural production in Thailand***

Many studies yield support to agro-ecological production methods and the proposition that the agricultural production system should be changed towards a more socially and ecologically sustainable one, with social concerns for producers and consumers.<sup>126</sup> Jan van Aken, a contributor of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report, for example, notes that a half hectare plot in Thailand can grow 70 species of vegetables, fruits and herbs, which provide far better nutrition and feed more people than a half-hectare plot of high-yielding rice.<sup>127</sup>

In Thailand, notable promoters of sustainable agricultural production include those in the Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN), which was formed as a loose network in 1989 by NGOs and small-scale farmers. By 1997, the AAN consisted of 84 member organisations.<sup>128</sup> An important regional AAN group is the AAN of the

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<sup>126</sup> For example, see Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, *Agriculture at a Crossroads. Global Report.*, 2009. This report based on a 4 year study of over 400 scientists, sponsored by governments and international agencies including the FAO, UNEP and the World Bank. It was accepted by more than 60 governments in 2008, but largely downplayed or ignored by the agencies that sponsored it (Shelly Feldman and Stephen Biggs, "The Politics of International Assessments: The IAASTD Process, Reception and Significance," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 12, no. 1 (2012), 144.). Other studies in support of agro-ecology or organic agriculture include, for example: De Schutter (2011); Altieri (2012); Badgley and Perfecto (2007).

<sup>127</sup> Geoffrey Lawrence and Philip McMichael, "The Question of Food Security," *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 19, no. 2 (2012), 137.

<sup>128</sup> Decha Siripat, "The Assembly of the Poor and Alternative Agriculture Policies (first Published in 1997)," in *The Path of Sustainable Agriculture*, 2nd ed. (Samut-sakorn: BioThai, 2011), 96. (in Thai)

Northeast which includes 40 farmer organisations in 14 provinces.<sup>129</sup> Main founders of the AAN include, for example, Mr. Witoon Lienchamroon of the BioThai Foundation in Nonthaburi, Mrs. Supha Yaimuang of the Sustainable Agriculture Foundation (SATHAI) in Nonthaburi, Mr. Decha Siripat of the Khao Kwan Foundation in Suphanburi, Dr. Chomchuan Boonrahong - former director of the Institute for a Sustainable Agriculture Community (ISAC) in Chiang Mai, and the Community of Agro-ecology Foundation (CAE) in Surin. The AAN promotes different forms of sustainable agriculture in Thailand such as organic, agro-forestry, natural and integrated farming.<sup>130</sup> Most organic products in Thailand are primary products such as rice, vegetables and fruits.<sup>131</sup> In the Thai domestic market sales of organic rice account for around 43 percent of organic sales, followed by sales of vegetables, tea, coffee and other products. Organic rice is also the most important organic export product.<sup>132</sup> Aside from the AAN, there are also other individuals and groups in Thailand that promote sustainable agriculture in their own ways, such as the Santi Asoke movement.<sup>133</sup>

Sustainable agricultural production methods in Thailand generally correspond to counter-hegemonic ideas, values and goals discussed in the previous part. The meaning of alternative or sustainable agriculture goes beyond agricultural production to include farmers' way of life. It is also concerned with the restoration

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<sup>129</sup> Unno (2003), 133.

<sup>130</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon, "Alternative Agriculture: A Path of Free and Independent Agriculture. A document summarising the academic content of the third congress of alternative agriculture (18-21 November 2004 at Kasetsart University)," in *Reform the Agricultural Sector for Food Security: Analysis and Practical Policies* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2011), 167-173. (in Thai)

<sup>131</sup> Green Net Co-operative's research quoted in National Committee to Develop Organic Agriculture, *National Strategic Plan to Develop Organic Agriculture 1 2008-2011 and National Practical Plan to Develop Organic Agriculture 2008-2011* (Bangkok: Sahamit Printing, 2008), 9. (in Thai)

<sup>132</sup> Green Net Co-operative's study in 2012, quoted in "National Strategic Plan to Develop Organic Agriculture 2 2013-2016 Draft," received from Ms. Wibulwan Wannamolee, Senior Specialist on Agri-Food Standards, National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards Office, 31 January 2013, 20. (in Thai)

<sup>133</sup> Unno (2003), 145. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss Asoke Buddhist communes.

and preservation of the ecological and environmental balance, as well as fair economic and social returns that increase the quality of life of farmers, consumers, and local social institutions.<sup>134</sup> Generally speaking, sustainable agricultural production is interpreted as methods which preserve and encourage bio-diversity and varieties of agri-food crops in farms. It is also seen as a way to reduce economic and food insecurity risks for small-scale farmers as they can rely on sales (and personal consumption) of a few crops instead of just one. In this sense, sustainable agricultural practices in Thailand challenge hegemonic commodification of agri-food resources, as well as conventional profit-led agri-food system discussed in chapter 3.

Many sustainable agriculture practitioners were inspired by some traditional methods of diversified farming such as fish raising in paddy fields, and the use of ecological balance to control predators and parasital insects.<sup>135</sup> Some notable sustainable farmers who have developed successful techniques or "local sage" include Mahayoo Sunthornchai in Surin province who started to develop his diversified farming techniques in 1973,<sup>136</sup> and Mr. Tool Sayamol who developed agro-forestry techniques.<sup>137</sup> The AAN is also inspired by traditional practices of free seed exchanges which encourage biodiversity and counteract monopoly control over seeds. Some also promote production practices where different types of seeds are planted so that the products can be harvest at different times, to reduce risks from drastic weather changes due to global warming<sup>138</sup> and to reduce labour costs.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon and Supha Yaimuang, "Alternative Agriculture: From Individual Farmers to Social Movements," in *Reform the Agricultural Sector for Food Security: Analysis and Practical Policies*, ed. Witoon Lienchamroon (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2011), 269. (in Thai)

<sup>135</sup> Siripat, "Diversified Farms: Solutions for Farmers," (2011), 79-82.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 83; Unno (2003), 109-111; Rojanapraiwong et al. (2004), 63.

<sup>137</sup> Unno (2003), 118.

<sup>138</sup> Dr. Permsak Mekarapirom, President of Thammakaset Community in Prajeenburi province and special lecturer at Mahidol University's Research Center for Peace Building, as well as Mr. Wiwat Salyakamthorn, President of the Agri-Nature Foundation, quoted in Bangkok Business Newspaper

Although sustainable agricultural practices in Thailand have developed before the popularisation of the King's sufficiency economy ideas and his New Theory of Agriculture, following the 1997 Asian economic crisis,<sup>140</sup> there are also those who were inspired by the New Theory such as the 1 rai-100,000 baht training group. The group is also experimenting with diversified sustainable production methods of conventional cash crops such as rubber.<sup>141</sup>

Various attempts to preserve and develop different strands of seeds in Thailand can be seen as counter-hegemonic challenges to monopoly controls over seeds. As discussed in part 1, farmers' control over seeds is seen as part of farmer rights, independence, and counter-hegemonic identity. Preservation and development of traditional seeds can also be seen as a challenge to commodification of seeds and agri-food products, because nutritional quality and local tastes are given a priority, whereas the hegemonic agri-food system tends to encourage the development of chemical-responsive rice seeds with short harvest time (and arguably lower quality). Such views and practices are similar to that of sustainable agriculture movements in some other countries, such as counter-hegemonic ideas of Vandana Shiva and the seed saving movement in India. Notable groups engaging in seed saving and development in Thailand include, for example, Khao Kwan Foundation, Tamor natural farmer group in Surin,<sup>142</sup> and Kammad sustainable agriculture group in Yasothon where there are 12 core households which have developed over 15

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(Jud-prakai section), "Natural Rice Production Method to Survive Flood," *Bangkok Business News*, October 13, 2011. (in Thai)

<sup>139</sup> Sukran Rojanapraiwong et al., *Local Genes and Sustainable Agriculture: A Document for the Third Alternative Agriculture Assembly 18-21 November 2004*, Kasetsart University (Nonthaburi: Pim-dee Printing, 2004), 38-44. (in Thai)

<sup>140</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon, BioThai, interviewed 5 April 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>141</sup> Adisorn Puangchompoo, 1 rai-100,000 baht project, interviewed 13 January 2013, Nonthaburi.

<sup>142</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 187 and 190.

traditional strands with help from academics from the Rice Center at Ubonratchathani province.<sup>143</sup>

Some people in the AAN often credit traditional Thai wisdom for inspiring sustainable agricultural practices. This can be seen as part of counter-hegemonic identity struggles discussed in part 1. Traditional knowledge is usually developed further by contemporary research and knowledge. Soil, for example, is treated with respect and not as a static container of elements, but as a place containing interacting living micro-organisms.<sup>144</sup> There is a widespread usage of the effective micro-organism (EM) soil improvement technology among SAM supporters.<sup>145</sup> Examples include Mr. Kittithanet Rangkaworaset of the 1 rai-100,000 baht training project who received inspirations from Buddhist texts and training in Japan, which allowed him to develop EM techniques which prioritise localised adaptation to prevent monopolisation.<sup>146</sup> Another example is Mr. Suchit Nokham of the Maeping Organic Company in Chiang Mai whose experimentation with probiotic micro-organisms in his own farm since 1992 has enabled him to diversify production to include many organic agri-food products such as longan, rice, soya, and chicken.<sup>147</sup> According to the Land Development Department (LDD), at least 1.5 million farming households in over 15 million rai farmers used micro-organisms to improve soil, which translated to economic benefits of around 9,400 million baht in 2004.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>144</sup> San Saeng-arun Magazine, "From Way of Life and Cultural Roots to Machine-like Farmers: Problems and Solutions in the View of Witoon Lienchamroon," *San Saeng-Arun Magazine* (Bangkok, 2012), 79. (in Thai)

<sup>145</sup> Unno (2003), 131.

<sup>146</sup> Kittithanet Rangkaworaset, 1 rai-100,000 baht project, interviewed 13 January 2013, Nonthaburi.

<sup>147</sup> Mr. Suchit Nokham, organic agriculture expert using probiotic microorganisms, Maeping Organic Limited Partnership Company, interviewed 2 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>148</sup> BioThai, "Effects of Intellectual Property Rights on Biodiversity under the EU-ASEAN FTA (written 2009 for the ASEAN Civil Society Conference, 2009, Phetchaburi, Thailand)," in *Reform the Agricultural Sector for Food Security: Analysis and Practical Policies* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2011), 92-93. (in Thai)



Sustainable farmer groups in Thailand have developed varieties of techniques and production patterns to suit different local contexts. For example, Mae-ta sustainable agriculture group in Chiang Mai is located near well-preserved forest areas, so they use agro-forestry techniques as well as knowledge of micro-organisms in their organic farms.<sup>149</sup> Some farmers also suggest that organic farming is possible even in small-scale farms if they are managed well.<sup>150</sup> Taptai group in Surin province, for example, diversified their production from rice to organic pig to make use of small plots of land, with some advices from a lecturer at Ratchamongkol Esaan University of Technology, Surin.<sup>151</sup> In urban areas, there is a growing movement of low income consumers who grow their own pesticide-free vegetables for health and economic reasons since the early 2010s. The movement is supported by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation and SATHAI's urban agriculture projects.<sup>152</sup> It should be noted, however, that although a lot of emphasis of the SAM is on helping small-scale farmers, many SAM members do not support only small sustainable farms and are open to other forms of production arrangement.<sup>153</sup> For example, part 3 of this chapter discusses organic farming arrangements organised by Khao Kwan Foundation.

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<sup>149</sup> Mr. Arpakorn Krueng-ngern, Mae-ta organic farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>150</sup> Mr. Rungroj Kajadroka, Tamor Natural Farmer group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>151</sup> Sukran Rojanaphraiwong, *A Mission in Self-Reliance: Report of the Study on Taptai Community Way of Life, Surin*, by Natpong Pattanapanchai and Arat Saeng-Ubol (Nonthaburi: Alternative Agriculture Network, 2008), 61. (in Thai)

<sup>152</sup> Mrs. Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, interviewed 3 October 2012, Nonthaburi. Also: <<http://www.thaicityfarm.com>>.

<sup>153</sup> For example, Decha Siripat suggests that there are successful sustainable farms of various sizes, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi. Others who suggest that large versus small size may not be the most crucial point in envisaging farming future, and that it is about how the farm is managed, include Ben White et al., "The New Enclosures: Critical Perspectives on Corporate Land Deals," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3–4 (July 2012), 626.

## ***2.2) Processing and retailing of sustainable agri-food products***

Promoters of sustainable agriculture in Thailand tend to recognise that it is insufficient to only promote sustainable agricultural production, and that there should also be complementary development of sustainable agri-food processing, as well as multi-level market channels (local, national and international) which respond to different production volumes and help to diversify sales opportunities. This is to help producers to earn higher income from sustainable premiums and to capture value-added from moving up along agri-food chains.<sup>154</sup> Well-developed processing and market channels which help to guarantee short and medium term sources of income, where producers receive premium prices for producing sustainable products, are seen as crucial incentives for producers to make transitions towards sustainable agri-food production. Some have also emphasised, however, that sustainable production should lead the market and not the other way round. This means that alternative markets should accommodate agro-ecological practices such as by supporting sales of seasonal agri-food products, usage of environmentally friendly packaging, and also try to limit distribution radius as much as possible.<sup>155</sup> This section provides a macro-view discussion of sustainable agri-food processing and market channels in Thailand, while counter-hegemonic market governance structures are discussed in greater detail in part 3.

In the late 1980s, some NGOs and academics in Thailand started to promote processing and marketing activities of sustainable agri-food products,<sup>156</sup> but there

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<sup>154</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 285.

<sup>155</sup> Boonrahong, Jantawongsri and Palee (2000), 35-37.

<sup>156</sup> Unno (2003), 145-146.

were a lot of difficulties due to the lack of interests from domestic consumers.<sup>157</sup> In the mid 1990s, civil society groups such as the Green Net Co-operative, Puanthammachart group, Asoke group, and Imboon center in Chiang Mai (established in 1994), managed to expand the number of green shops and consumer interests in Thailand. Such expansion was made possible by health concerns prevalent among Thai consumers, particularly the Thai middle class.<sup>158</sup> This suggests that consumer support is crucial, and that it is important to promote counter-hegemonic ideas in wider society to aid counter-hegemonic practices. By 1996, there were around 33 green shops in many big cities such as Bangkok (18 shops), Chiang Mai and Songkla.<sup>159</sup> A lot of green shops closed down after the Asian economic crisis of 1997, but the movement did not die off completely. By the early 2000s, modern trade players in the organic market became prominent, such as Lemon Farm supermarket.<sup>160</sup>

There are those who believe in the benefits of large-scale distribution of sustainable agri-food products, such as Mr. Vitoon Panyakul - one of the founders of the Green Net Co-operative in Thailand (established in 1993) - who argues for the importance of having centralised bodies to professionally manage logistics and distribution of agri-food products in large scale.<sup>161</sup> Green Net is a member of the Fairtrade Labeling Organization International (FLO) and exports to many European countries. With its sister Earth Net Foundation, Green Net helps to promote the expansion of organic production in Thailand, such as in Yasothon province, and acts

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<sup>157</sup> Supha Yaimuang et al., *Alternative Market: Partnership for a New Society* (Bangkok: Pim-dee Printing, 1996), 35. (in Thai)

<sup>158</sup> Vitoon Panyakul and Jade-sanee Sukjirattikarn, *Organic Market: Opportunities and Paths to World Organic Markets* (Bangkok: Earth Net Foundation/Green Net Co-operative, 2003), 131-132 (in Thai); Ms. Pornpilai Lertwicha, researcher on Thai rural communities, skype interview 17 October 2012; Mrs. Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, interviewed 3 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>159</sup> Unno (2003), 147.

<sup>160</sup> Panyakul and Sakjirattikarn (2003), 133.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 147

as a distribution center of over 100 organic products in Thailand and abroad, such as fruits, vegetable, rice, tea, etc.<sup>162</sup> On the other hand, some main figures in the AAN prefer developing local markets and more direct forms of marketing channels, as well as to encourage smaller-scale farmer groups to produce different varieties of agri-food products and move up along agri-food chains.<sup>163</sup> Notable local green markets in Thailand include the ones in Chiang Mai, Surin and Yasothon provinces, but there are also green alternative markets in other provinces such as Chachoengsao and Bangkok.

In Surin, the main green market started to operate since 2003. In the early 2010s, there are around 65 to 70 sellers of various products such as rice, vegetables, fish and organic pork.<sup>164</sup> Organic farm visits are often organised and are seen as opportunities for consumers to learn more about organic agri-food production, which help them to have realistic demands regarding prices and quality of organic agri-food products.<sup>165</sup> Active participants in the market include those from Taptai community in Surin. With relatively secured market channels, the group is able to purchase organic pork from members at 50 percent higher prices than in conventional markets, and also has a long-term plan to invest in small-scale industrial machineries to produce other organic pork products and develop their own brand.<sup>166</sup> There are also smaller green markets in Surin and also in Yasothon which started to become more popular in the 2000s because of growing consumer support of organic products.<sup>167</sup> In Chiang Mai, aside from green local markets such as the JJ Organic Market, Mae-ta

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<sup>162</sup> Suphachai Lorlohakarn, *Organic Farming Business* (Bangkok: National Innovation Agency and Asian Institute of Technology, 2007), 134 and 196-197. (in Thai)

<sup>163</sup> Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, interviewed 3 October 2012, Nonthaburi and Chomchuan Boonrahong, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>164</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 178-179 and 182 .

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

<sup>166</sup> Mrs. Kanya Oonsri, village leader and leader of Baan Taptai-Tanon organic agriculture group, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>167</sup> Ubol Yoowah, NGO activist, interviewed 22 December 2012, Yasothon.

sustainable agriculture group also engages in Community Support Agriculture (CSA); a direct selling of pre-paid vegetable boxes to around 16 to 50 consumer households (depending on the season).<sup>168</sup>

This section has provided an overview of different types of alternative processing and market channels which help to promote the production of sustainable agri-food products in Thailand. The next section focuses on producer rice mills and sustainable farmer groups in Yasothon and Surin provinces as examples of farmer groups which produce, process and sell their own products.

### ***2.3) Producer rice mills and sustainable farmer groups in Surin and Yasothon***

This section discusses a few notable AAN groups and producer rice mills in Surin and Yasothon which try to process and sell their own products to bypass middlemen and to fully benefit from sustainable and fair trade premiums. They also try to capture value-added that comes with moving up along agri-food supply chains. These groups aim to fairly distribute their profits to farmer members, encourage member participation, support community welfare and encourage sustainable farming in a wider scale. As chapter 1 discussed, these groups provide interesting examples of counter-hegemony in the agri-food system because they are well-established widely networked groups with a long history of learning from experience, which allow them to develop different varieties of practical counter-hegemonic alternatives. First, this section discusses relatively large-scale producer rice mills and sustainable production of their member groups. These rice mills include Rice Fund Surin Organic Agriculture Cooperative in Surin province, as well as rice mills of Naso Rakthammachart group, Bak-rua organic farmer group, and

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<sup>168</sup> Arpakorn Krueng-ngern, Mae-ta organic farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

Nam-om community enterprise in Yasothon province. To give a fuller picture, smaller-scale producer rice mills with distinct characteristics are also discussed, namely Kammad Sustainable Agriculture group and Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network in Yasothon. Factual information and contact detail of each group can be found in Appendix 1.

Alternative agriculture movements in Surin and Yasothon started to develop since the 1980s. In 1995, the AAN of the Northeast was formed to promote production, processing, and marketing of sustainable agri-food products, as well as to create venues for member groups to exchange their ideas and knowledge.<sup>169</sup> Farmer founders in many groups became interested in alternative agriculture because they experienced what they perceived to be unfair and unjust trading practices, where they felt exploited by middlemen and rice mills because they lacked knowledge and bargaining power. In addition, they had also observed negative health and ecological effects of Green Revolution agricultural methods.<sup>170</sup> Founders of Naso Rakthammachart group, for example, were inspired to find alternatives to the mainstream agricultural production after seeing a lot of fish died in the paddy field due to agricultural chemicals. Moreover, they also experienced rising costs of production while paddy prices, determined by powerful middlemen and rice mills, seemed to stagnate.<sup>171</sup> Such instances ignite many people's interests in herbal medications and sustainable agriculture.<sup>172</sup> They were also inspired by Fukuoka's visit and his ideas of natural farming, and developed their own techniques further to

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<sup>169</sup> Rojanaprai Wong et al. (2004), 67.

<sup>170</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 160-161.

<sup>171</sup> Kanoksak Kaewthep, "Rakthammachart Rice mill: Naso Community, Ampur Kudchum, Yasothon Province," in *Community Organised Welfare (2): Production Groups. Journal of Political Economy (for the community) 18* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 2001), 124-125. (in Thai)

<sup>172</sup> Mr. Man Samsri, one main original founder of Naso Rakthammachart group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

suit local conditions.<sup>173</sup> Another example is Mr. Boonsong Martkhao, founder of Kammad and former member of the Naso group, who started to experiment with sustainable agriculture between 1989 and 1995 because he experienced high costs of production, rising debt, and deteriorating health conditions.<sup>174</sup>

In Surin, the Farmer Rice Seller Network was formed in 1987 to collect paddy in bulk from Sahatham for Development, Ta-toom Natural Agriculture, and Surin Natural Agriculture groups. It was hoped that this would increase market power of farmers in relation to rice mills and middlemen. The network received support from many groups and people such as NGOs, Green Net Co-operative, Saneh Jamarik,<sup>175</sup> as well as Luang-po Naan - a monk from Ta-sawang temple, who helped to raise funds from the locals and state development programmes to build a producer-controlled rice mill. Through a Swiss NGO called CLARO, the network started to export pesticide-free rice to European and fair trade markets for the first time in the early 1990s.<sup>176</sup> In 2002, it received funding from the state-funded pilot programme (discussed in part 3) to build a 24 tons per day capacity rice mill and to build a warehouse that could hold 500 tons of rice. In 2003, the rice mill was registered as a co-operative, with smaller producer groups named according to the areas such as Tamor, Ta-toom, and Taptai.<sup>177</sup> In 2012, the Rice Fund Surin Organic Agriculture Co-operative had 250 out of 326 members who passed organic certification.<sup>178</sup> Since 2005, it was certified a Fairtrade producer group by FLO<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Kata (2005), 21.

<sup>174</sup> Boonsong Martkhao, Kammad Sustainable Agriculture group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>175</sup> Ms. Sompoi Jansang, Manager of the Rice Fund Surin Organic Agriculture Co-operative Ltd, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>176</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 165; Rattanawaraha (2007), 11.

<sup>177</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 167-168.

<sup>178</sup> Sompoi Jansang, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>179</sup> Rice mill manager's interview, 6 November 2012, quoted in Prachason et al. (2012), 168.

and took over marketing activities from Green Net Co-operative.<sup>180</sup> In 2012, the Surin rice mill sold its rice through its retail store in Surin call "Khao-hom" and directly to consumers in Bangkok (40 percent), while the rest was exported to France, the US, the UK and Australia (60 percent).<sup>181</sup>

In Yasothon, Naso Rakthammachart and Bak-rua groups seem to have some similar experiences in the building up of their counter-hegemonic ideas and practices. Naso group thought that members' economic situations would improve if they could bypass middlemen by having their own rice mill to process and sell their own rice.<sup>182</sup> Between 1991 and 1993, the group lobbied for a budget from the state to build their own producer rice mill and encouraged other farmer groups in the province to do the same.<sup>183</sup> Similar to the case of Naso, some farmers in Bak-rua community started to form a group in 1976 to increase their bargaining power in relation to paddy middlemen.<sup>184</sup> In 1994, Bak-rua group managed to use community savings and provincial budget to build a community rice mill.<sup>185</sup> In 2012, Naso rice mill had 243 members and milled around 650 to 700 tons of rice (conventional and organic) per year.<sup>186</sup> Bak-rua rice mill also had around 200 members and milled 600 tons of rice per year (400 out of 600 tons were organic rice).<sup>187</sup> Both Bak-rua and Naso producer rice mills export their organic and fair trade rice through Green Net Co-operative since the mid 1990s. Naso also sells directly to consumers in local and urban areas through many brands, shops and Yasothon local markets.<sup>188</sup> It also tries

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<sup>180</sup> Sompoi Jansang, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>181</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 172.

<sup>182</sup> Ms. Chutima Muangman, Manager of Naso rice mill, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>183</sup> Kata (2005), 21.

<sup>184</sup> Ms. Somwang Chomchuen, Manager of Bak-rua rice mill, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Chutima Muangman, Naso rice mill, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>187</sup> Somwang Chomchuen, Bak-rua rice mill, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*



to establish linkages with other co-operatives such as a fruit-selling co-operative in Jantaburi province, as well as socially conscious companies and organisations in Thailand which purchase rice from the group.<sup>189</sup> Both Naso and Bak-rua require members to invest some shares in the rice mills. In return, members will receive dividends. In addition, both groups have community saving banks which help with the rice mills' cash flow, especially with paddy payment.<sup>190</sup> There are also collaborations between community rice mills in Yasothon with regards to cash flow, price setting, and to develop other rice products such as rice bran capsules.<sup>191</sup>

A relatively newer Nam-oom sustainable farming group in Yasothon was established around 1999, and was aided by an academic, Dr. Seri Phongpit, who helped to facilitate discussions between 12 villages regarding problems facing farmers. The discussions encouraged many people, including village leaders, to turn to organic rice production as a partial solution.<sup>192</sup> The group registered as a community enterprise in 2008 and received some funding from the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operative (BAAC) to expand their rice mill capacity. Members have grown from 100 to 538 people by 2012.<sup>193</sup> The enterprise received organic standards such as BCS in 2002 and exports organic rice to fair trade and organic markets in Europe with the help of Aden company. By 2012, the mill processed over 700 to 800 tons of rice a year on average.<sup>194</sup> The enterprise is managed by a 15 member committee and also has a profit sharing scheme according

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<sup>189</sup> Chutima Muangman, Naso rice mill, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid* and Somwang Chomchuen, Bak-rua rice mill, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>191</sup> Somwang Chomchuen, Bak-rua rice mill, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>192</sup> Boonyuen Arj-arsa, a committee member of Nam-oom Sustainable Agriculture Social Enterprise, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>193</sup> Kamnueng Maneebool, advisor and former president of Nam-oom Sustainable Agriculture Social Enterprise, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>194</sup> Kamnueng Maneebool and Boonyuen Arj-arsa, Nam-oom enterprise, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

to members' shares in the enterprise.<sup>195</sup> Nam-oom community enterprise, as well as Naso and Bak-rua community rice mills, are usually considered "success" cases of community rice mills in Thailand, but as section 2.4 discusses in detail, such success is based on certain conditions that might not be available to other groups. In addition, the rice mills sometimes face financial and management problems, as well as other limitations.

Other relatively newer producer rice mill groups in Yasothon, such as Kammad and the moral rice network, have developed their counter-hegemonic practices to suit their particular conditions and also as a response to perceived problems of older groups such as Naso. Kammad group, for example, branched out from Naso in 2010 even though some members still sell some paddy to Naso rice mill. This is because most of the land in that area (around 6,000 rai in 4 Tambol) falls under the jurisdiction of the Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO) so members could receive some support from ALRO. The group also receives help from some academics and some companies' corporate social responsibility projects. By 2012, the group had around 100 organic farmer members in total.<sup>196</sup> One distinctive feature of the group is that they focus on producing traditional rice strands and direct domestic sales, such as to individuals and restaurants. The group preserves over 100 strands of traditional rice and 12 households produce organic rice seeds.<sup>197</sup>

Kammad members reflected on their experience during the pilot programme (discusses in part 3) and concluded that to reduce risks and costs, they should shorten management chains. In addition, since Kammad is a relatively small group, members prefer using a decentralised management system where there is no centralised space

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<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Boonsong Martkhao, Kammad group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

to hold the paddy. Instead, members hold paddy in their own barns. When there are orders from consumers, paddy is milled at the central mill and then directly transported to the consumers. One main benefit of such an arrangement is that the group does not have to borrow from banks to purchase paddy, and hence does not have to pay interest rates.<sup>198</sup> Similarly, Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network in Yasothon has a central headquarter which relies on small-scale rice mills in different communities to reduce costs. In 2012, the group had 9 small rice mills and were going to build another 12 mills to service 20 of their centers. Meetings are held to plan organic rice production according to consumer demands, and the headquarter also checks the quality of rice before distribution.<sup>199</sup> Some members also engage in the preservation and development of traditional rice strands, with the aim to provide good quality, inexpensive, and nutritious organic rice for domestic consumers rather than to export.<sup>200</sup>

As part 1 has discussed, actors in the SAM in Thailand employ different varieties of counter-hegemonic terms and discourses. Most organic farmers interviewed in Yasothon tend to employ secular terms and discourses to describe their counter-hegemonic ideas and practices. However, as the name suggests, those in the moral rice network explicitly adopt Buddhist ideas and incorporate them in their sustainable agricultural practices. In 2006, the groups' farmer manifesto was written to set some guidelines of how members would agree to adopt some moral standards, such as to give up on liquor, smoking and gambling. In 2006, around 100 people joined the group but only 38 people passed both organic and morality

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<sup>198</sup> Interviews of group leaders and members, quoted in Prachason et al. (2012), 139-140.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>200</sup> Nikhom Pechpa, main co-ordinator for the Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network, interviewed 23 December 2013, Yasothon.

standards. By 2012, there were around 100 members who met the standards.<sup>201</sup> The group has established 16 learning centers across the province to promote sustainable agricultural production and facilitate knowledge sharing,<sup>202</sup> as well as 16 saving funds in the area.<sup>203</sup> Monks from Thamma-ruamjai temple also help to promote morality standards, while the groups' radio station helped to promote their ideas and sustainable agricultural knowledge in Yasothon and nearby provinces.<sup>204</sup>

The moral rice network has also developed through collaborations with other groups in Thailand. For example, researchers from the Institute of Co-operative study at Kasetsart University in Nonthaburi had helped the group with setting-up capital. They also helped to find market channels, such as by connecting the moral rice network with Paragon and The mall department stores. Burapha television company also helped by establishing a consumer network which pre-orders organic rice to help producers with production planning and cash flow situation.<sup>205</sup> In 2009, the moral rice group managed to set their organic rice price higher than the prices of organic jasmine rice in the same area by 25 percent.<sup>206</sup> In 2012, the group also started to search for other distribution channels, such as through postal service and other forms of direct sales.<sup>207</sup>

This section has discussed producer rice mills and organic rice farmer groups in Yasothon and Surin as examples of counter-hegemonic groups which produce, process and distribute sustainable agri-food products. The next section evaluates the

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<sup>201</sup> Juthatip Patrawart, "Branding as the Marketing Strategy for Organic Products: A Case Study on Moral Rice," *Asian Journal of Food and Agro-Industry* (2009), 256.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>203</sup> Pechpa et al. (2009), English and Thai abstract.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 131.

<sup>206</sup> See the Abstract of Patrawart (2009).

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

counter-hegemonic potential of such alternative agri-food practices. Benefits and limitations of these producer rice mills are also explored alongside some other examples of sustainable agriculture groups, to give a fuller picture of counter-hegemonic potential of sustainable agricultural practices in Thailand.

#### ***2.4) Counter-hegemonic potential of sustainable agri-food practices***

This section explores counter-hegemonic potential of sustainable agri-food production-distribution practices discussed in the previous sections. The first sub-section discusses some evidence of viability and benefits of sustainable agri-food practices. The following sub-section then discusses current limitations of sustainable agri-food practices. Ownership and access to agricultural land also affect the transition towards sustainable agriculture, but this issue will be discussed in the next chapter.

##### ***Evidence in support of counter-hegemonic potential***

There is evidence to suggest that sustainable agri-food practices, if properly managed and implemented under supportive conditions, can yield many material and non-material benefits. Sustainable agriculture activists and farmers suggest that sustainable agricultural production leads to lower costs of production and similar levels of yield as conventional production,<sup>208</sup> especially after a few transitional years.<sup>209</sup> Many individual success stories where sustainable farmers managed to raise

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<sup>208</sup> Sompoi Jansang, Rice Fund Surin rice mill, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin; Decha Siripat, Khao Kwan Foundation, interviewed 14 October 2012; Mr. Kiatsak Chatdee, co-ordinator at the Institute for a Sustainable Agriculture Community (ISAC), interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>209</sup> Decha Siripat, Khao Kwan Foundation, interviewed 14 October 2012; Mr. Thamma Sangkalee, Ta-toom Natural Farmer group, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin.

their quality of life are used to back up these arguments.<sup>210</sup> In many cases, the costs of organic production can roughly be the same as conventional production due to higher labour costs.<sup>211</sup> A study of harvest year 2005/2006 of 80 farmers in Surin, for example, suggests the organic jasmine rice farming can help to improve economic situations of farmers because of higher yield (an average of 411 compare to 379 kg. per rai) and higher price (around 10 compare to 7 or 8 baht per kg.), while the costs of production are roughly the same (2,662 baht per rai for organic compare to 2,619 baht per rai for conventional production).<sup>212</sup> Another study in 2009 of 80 people in 5 producer groups in Chiang Mai who grow products such as longan and rice, suggests that organic farmers in the transitional period received a higher level of income per year on average compare to conventional farmers.<sup>213</sup>

Interviews of sustainable farmers in Surin and Yasothon also suggest that average organic rice paddy yield is comparable to that of conventional production. For example, farmer members of Tamor and Ta-toom in Surin reported their average yield to be between 350 and 500 kg. per rai, which is similar to conventional yield in the same region.<sup>214</sup> Similarly, Bak-rua members' average organic rice paddy yield was around 350 kg. per rai or more.<sup>215</sup> Average rice paddy yield in other parts of the country, such as in the Central plain, tends to be higher due to better irrigation and

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<sup>210</sup> Pat Apaimul, Mae-ta organic farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>211</sup> Suchit Nokham, Maeping Organic Company, interviewed 2 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>212</sup> Manus Losirikul and Prasit Karnchan, *The Possibility of Hom Mali Rice Production in Organic Farming Systems as an Alternative Farming Career with Poverty Alleviation Potential for Lower-Northeastern Farmers: A Case of Surin province* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2006), Executive Summary. (in Thai)

<sup>213</sup> Sukhum Pannarong and Pimolna Boonyasena, *A Study of Development Opportunity and Direction of Organic Crop Production System* (Chiang Mai: Research and Development Center for Community Economy, Economics Department, Chiang Mai University and the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT), 2009), 140. (in Thai)

<sup>214</sup> Pakphum Inpan, Tamor Natural Farmer group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin; Thamma Sangkalee, Ta-toom Natural Farmer group, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin. However, during drought, yield could fall to 100 kg./rai.

<sup>215</sup> Somwang Chomchuen, Bak-rua rice mill, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

soil quality. For example, in Chiang Mai, Maeping Organic Company's rice paddy fields reportedly produce an average yield of 600 kg. per rai.<sup>216</sup> For those who sell their products through organic and fair trade channels in Yasothon and Surin, a study in 2011 of around 145 households suggests that they had significantly lower costs of production for organic rice paddy (a difference of around 7,600 baht per a ton of paddy), and hence net profit for sustainable farmers (revenue minus production and marketing costs) was 5,533 baht per ton of paddy on average, while conventional farmers in the same areas received an average of -2,293 baht per ton of paddy.<sup>217</sup> Sustainable farmers also received additional benefits from a wider range of agri-food products and from fair trade premiums.<sup>218</sup> The diversity of output throughout the year can also help to reduce production risks and costs of living.<sup>219</sup>

One main difference between conventional and sustainable agricultural practices, is how sustainable producers have opportunities to increase their bargaining power in the market and embed values in their agri-food products. For example, Mr. Thamma Sangkalee of Ta-toom Natural Farmer group in Surin suggests that when farmers grow cash crops, they lack power to influence prices and have to "beg" others to buy their products.<sup>220</sup> With sustainable agri-food products and alternative market channels, farmers have more say in price setting.<sup>221</sup> Kammad group also wants to be able to discuss with consumers the setting of fair prices, and chooses not to deal with consumers who do not understand the value of their work

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<sup>216</sup> Suchit Nokham, Maeping Organic Company, interviewed 2 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>217</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 277.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>219</sup> Suphakit Manopimok and et al., *A Complete Report on the Research Project on the Possibility of Alternative Agriculture in Thailand: An Economics Analysis* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2001), 24-25. (in Thai)

<sup>220</sup> Thamma Sangkalee, Ta-toom Natural Farmer group, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

and sustainable products.<sup>222</sup> By selling through socially conscious enterprises such as Green Net Co-operative, members of Naso Rakthammachart group can discuss their production problems and participate in price setting, which give them more power compare to selling through conventional business channels.<sup>223</sup> At the Surin rice mill, members can participate in paddy measuring and other activities, which makes the paddy selling process more transparent compare to private rice mills.<sup>224</sup> In addition, multi-channel alternative markets provide more options for producers.<sup>225</sup> For example, farmers in Yasothon and Surin can be members of more than one group and can sell their organic rice directly to consumers in green markets or to the rice mills.<sup>226</sup>

Alternative green markets have also been credited as positive forces for job creations and as important additional sources of income. For example, CSA and green market initiatives in Chiang Mai create jobs for young people in Mae-Ta community.<sup>227</sup> Individual situations differ, but many Naso farmers who sell their produce at the Yasothon local green market receive around 10,000 to 20,000 baht per month,<sup>228</sup> while some farmers from Taptai group reportedly earn 100,000 baht per person per year from the local green market in Surin.<sup>229</sup> For Taptai, income from local green market is comparable to that from selling organic and fair trade rice. In addition, drought could reduce a person's earning from organic rice to 50,000 baht

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<sup>222</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 151-152.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, 151.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, 195.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, Executive Summary page (4).

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, 147 and 149 and 1164. Example includes Mr. Uthai Juansang, Bak-rua organic farmer who has a household-scale mill and sells organic rice in local markets in addition to selling through Bak-rua rice mill (interviewed 24 December 2012).

<sup>227</sup> For example, Arpakorn Krueng-ngern, a young Mae-ta organic farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>228</sup> Chutima Muangman, Naso rice mill, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>229</sup> Kanya Oonsri, leader of Baan Taptai-Tanon group, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin.



per year<sup>230</sup> which suggests that diversifying sources of income, such as through local green markets, help to reduce economic risks. The earnings from local green markets are not insignificant. According to the statistics in 2011, the average monthly income per household in the Northeast was 18,217 baht per month.<sup>231</sup> A farm operator household in the Northeast earned around 14,300 to 14,400 baht per month (excluding those in forestry and fishery activities), while farm workers earned 9,437 baht per month of monetary income.<sup>232</sup> Taptai group's plan to produce other organic pork products<sup>233</sup> and Nam-oom enterprise's plan to encourage younger members to learn English to help with marketing,<sup>234</sup> are also examples of how sustainable agri-food production-distribution channels can create jobs. Moreover, NGO activists point to the benefits of local markets in fostering interactions and understanding between consumers and producers.<sup>235</sup>

Some discussions and evaluations of sustainable agriculture in Thailand only focus on a few aspects, such as monetary returns, costs of production and yield, which are typical of mainstream economic analyses. However, since the SAM's goals and values extend beyond these issues and cover other non-material aspects of life, it is important to evaluate sustainable agri-food practices on these criteria as well. Aside from monetary rewards, it has been noted that sustainable agriculture has many positive benefits such as in terms of local food security from diversified

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<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Quoted in TABLE 2: average monthly income per household by source of income and socio-economic class, Northeastern region: 2011 (in Baht), cited from the National Statistical Office (NSO), Thailand <<http://www.nso.go.th/>>, retrieved 9 October 2014.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>233</sup> Kanya Oonsri, leader of Baan Taptai-Tanon group, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>234</sup> Kamnueng Maneebool, Nam-oom Enterprise, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>235</sup> Triyada Trimakka and Ubol Yoo-wah, *A Study on Alternative Markets in Thailand: Market Access of Small-Scale Farmers* (Nonthaburi: SATHAI, 2008), quoted in Prachason et al. (2012), 185.

farming methods,<sup>236</sup> improved health conditions, and social ties.<sup>237</sup> Some farmers who used to work as low-skilled labourers and faced health problems, for example, reportedly benefited from green markets and organic farming in Surin, which gave them options not to have to continue working as low-skilled labourers.<sup>238</sup> In addition, some have noted how sustainable agri-food production and alternative markets give career options for parents in rural areas, so that they do not necessarily have to migrate.<sup>239</sup> Stronger family ties are also seen as being linked to personal happiness and prevention of social problems such as teenage drugs addiction.<sup>240</sup>

In terms of gender equality, the research did not uncover serious obstacles facing women from engaging in sustainable agri-food practices. Some promoters of sustainable agriculture suggest that for a farming household to successfully make a transition to sustainable agriculture, it is important to provide sustainable agriculture training for both men and women in the household.<sup>241</sup> Moreover, it has been noted that women are particularly active in the marketing and processing of sustainable agri-food products,<sup>242</sup> which can help to improve their economic situations. In Chiang Mai green market, for example, an average female seller could earn an income of 15,000 baht per month.<sup>243</sup> Women also managed to gain leadership positions in many organisations such as in Naso, Bak-rua, and Surin producer rice

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<sup>236</sup> Suggestions from personal experience by, for example, Kanoksak Duangkaewruan, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai and Uthai Juansang, member of the Bak-rua Rice Farmer group, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>237</sup> For example: Manopimok et al. (2001), 24-25.

<sup>238</sup> Nattapong Pattanapanchai and Arat Saeng-ubon, *A Report on the Taptai Community Way of Life, Surin* (Surin: Alternative Agriculture Network, 2007, 43 quoted in Prachason et al. (2012), 186.

<sup>239</sup> Adisorn Puangchompoo, 1 rai-100,000 baht project, interviewed 13 January 2013, Nonthaburi.

<sup>240</sup> Ms. Nanta Haitook and Ms. Janda Inpan, President and treasurer of Baan Tanon Organic Herb and Vegetable Processing Group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin; Rungroj Kajadroka, Tamor Natural Farmer group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>241</sup> Chomchuan Boonrahong, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid* and Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, interviewed 3 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>243</sup> Chomchuan Boonrahong, interviewed 3 November 2014. In 2011, the average monthly income per household in the North was 17,350 baht per month (quoted in Table 2: average monthly income per household by source of income and socio-economic class, Northern region: 2011 (in Baht), cited from the National Statistical Office (NSO), Thailand <<http://www.nso.go.th/>>, retrieved 9 October 2014).

mills,<sup>244</sup> as well as in Baan Taptai organic farmer group and Baan Tanon organic herb and vegetable processing group in Surin.<sup>245</sup> In many sustainable agriculture groups, however, leaders were mostly men.

Sustainable farmer groups can also create positive externalities which benefit not only their members but local communities. Aside from providing production support, some producer rice mills such as Bak-rua and Naso provide welfare benefits and monetary aids to their members and local communities.<sup>246</sup> For example, Naso uses some of its earning from the fair trade premium to fund farmers who are making transitions toward organic agriculture, and also contribute to the natural disaster relief fund.<sup>247</sup>

### *Current problems and counter-hegemonic limitations*

Despite some progress, sustainable agricultural development in Thailand is still rather limited from a national perspective. In 2012, the share of organic farmland in total agricultural land in Thailand was estimated to be only around 0.2 percent.<sup>248</sup> In a well-known organic rice production area such as Surin, it is estimated that organic agricultural practices constitute only 1 percent of all agricultural activities in the province.<sup>249</sup> The following paragraphs explore some important problems associated with sustainable agri-food production, processing and marketing channels, which limit their counter-hegemonic potential. In sum, problems include how farmers can

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<sup>244</sup> In 2012, managers of these rice mills were all female.

<sup>245</sup> Nanta Haitook, President of Baan Tanon Organic Herb and Vegetable Processing Group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>246</sup> Somwang Chomchuen, Bak-rua rice mill, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon and Prachason et al. (2012), 148-149.

<sup>247</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 133.

<sup>248</sup> Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), *The World of Organic Agriculture. Statistics and Emerigng Trends 2014*, ed. Helga Willer and Lernoud Julia (Frick and Bonn: FiBL and IFOAM, 2014), 186.

<sup>249</sup> Sompoi Jansang, Rice Fund Surin mill, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin.

be deterred from changing their production methods to sustainable agriculture, such as organic farming, because of many technical problems they will face in the first few years which can lower their income, and because of the knowledge-intensive nature of sustainable production. Migration to urban areas and the lack of farm labourers also contribute to high costs of production. The problems are also connected to the governance structures of sustainable agri-food products. As part 3 discusses, the costs of certification of sustainable agri-food products can alienate some farmers and also add significant costs to producer groups.

In the first few transitional years toward sustainable agriculture, there can be many technical problems and yield will tend to drop before soil quality improves.<sup>250</sup> Some farmers who are deeply convinced of the benefits of creating sustainable agri-food alternatives will accept such risks and persevere, but most farmers are motivated by short and medium term monetary gains due to necessity. Since sustainable agriculture requires a lot of time and labour to change the whole production system, farmers tend to back out when they start to face serious obstacles.<sup>251</sup> It has also been suggested that in local Surin/Khmer culture, some farmers care a lot about "losing face" if their rice or paddy fields are not as physically pleasing as other farmers', which deter them from organic rice farming.<sup>252</sup>

Difficulties in changing the production system to a more sustainable one can also be attributed to the lack of agro-ecological knowledge and research in Thailand.

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<sup>250</sup> Kiatsak Chatdee, ISAC, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai; Nanthiya Hutaniwat and Narong Hutaniwat, *Before a Community Rice Mill Business Can Be Established: A Case Study of Bakrua Farmer Group, Yasothon province* (Ubolratchathani: Local Development Institute (LDI), 2000), 91-92 (in Thai); Assistant Professor Ampapan Pongpladisai, Science lecturer at Ratchapat Surin University, interviewed 21 December 2012.

<sup>251</sup> Ms. Suwonasart Konbua, Green Net Co-operative officer, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>252</sup> Assistant Professor Ampapan Pongpladisai, Science lecturer at Ratchapat Surin University, interviewed 21 December 2012.

There are very few academic courses which teach sustainable agricultural practices, such as at Thammasart and Majoe Universities.<sup>253</sup> Moreover, in contrary to some mainstream perceptions that sustainable agriculture means "doing nothing" to the farm or simply just applying some standard techniques and organic fertilisers, many people in the movement point to the need to develop new and more extensive knowledge of agro-ecology which meet distinct needs of different areas.<sup>254</sup> For example, some farmers think that applying home-made organic fertilisers are sufficient to improve soil, but such practice can be improved by using laboratory analyses and other types of technology to develop probiotic micro-organisms in the soil.<sup>255</sup> In addition, many practitioners suggest that research in universities should be more relevant to real farming conditions, or should perhaps be in joint-cooperation with farmers.<sup>256</sup> As part 3 discusses, there is no comprehensive national plan to encourage research in sustainable agricultural methods in Thailand, although there are some support from some state offices.

The lack of farm labourers in the agricultural sector also affects the expansion of sustainable agricultural production, because it tends to require more effort compare to conventional production. The problem is partly accrued to the growing average age of farmers and migration of younger generations, which add significantly to the costs of sustainable agricultural production.<sup>257</sup> Some have argued that agro-ecological production and diversified farms, where different varieties of

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<sup>253</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon, BioThai, interviewed 5 April 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>254</sup> Kiatsak Chatdee, ISAC, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>255</sup> Suchit Nokham, Maeping Organic Company, interviewed 2 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>256</sup> Mr. Nichai Taipanich, Agricultural Advisor Office, Department of Agriculture and, interviewed 17 January 2013, Nonthaburi; Arpakorn Krueng-ngern, Mae-ta farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>257</sup> Sompoi Jansang, Rice Fund Surin, interviewed 19 December 2012 and Uthai Juansang, Bak-rua Rice Farmer group, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

crops aid each other's growth, can help reduce labour requirement and costs.<sup>258</sup> Additionally, some have pointed out the need to innovate inexpensive agricultural technology that can help small-scale farmers reduce their labour efforts.<sup>259</sup> Kammad group has tried to promote interests in organic agri-food production among the younger generation, such as by working with local schools to open organic agriculture courses.<sup>260</sup> As part 1 has discussed, aside from economic problems and risks facing farmers, farming is generally seen as a lowly profession in Thailand, and hence attempts to create counter-hegemonic identities of farmers are important.

Owing to limited expansion of agri-food production and other production problems, sustainable agri-food processing industry in Thailand is not well-developed. It has been argued that to successfully manage the processing and distribution of agri-food products, certain scales need to be reached for efficiency.<sup>261</sup> However, there are still few processed organic agri-food products in Thailand due to insufficient and inconsistent supply.<sup>262</sup> Moreover, as part 3 discusses in greater detail, some forms of pre-arranged planning and co-operation between producers, processors, and retailers, whether through formal contract or informal long-term social relations based on trusts, are important to develop value-added agri-food products in larger scales. Without such arrangements, farmers might be more reluctant to expand their production. On the other hand, if organic farmers suddenly

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<sup>258</sup> From experiences of farmers such as Arpakorn Krueng-ngern, Mae-ta organic farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>259</sup> Mr. Manas Jittanadilokkul, Multiple Paths of Sustainable Community Project in the North, interview 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>260</sup> Boonsong Martkhao, Kammad group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>261</sup> Mr. Viton Panyakul, main founder of Green Net Co-operative, interviewed 23 January 2013, Bangkok.

<sup>262</sup> Panyakul and Sakjirattikarn (2003), 135; Ms. Archinya Ourapeepattanapong, Managing Director at Chiangmai Organic and Spa Co. Ltds (health and beauty products), email exchange date 16 January 2013; Mr. Paladisai Jinapak, All Be One Thailand (export organic longan products), email exchange date 18 January 2013.

refuse to sell to green retail shops because short-term prices in conventional market are exceptionally high, it will damage the retailers.<sup>263</sup>

Aside from sustainability certifications (discusses in part 3), retailers and consumers in domestic and international markets also tend to impose physical appearance standards on agri-food products and their packaging,<sup>264</sup> which at times can be rather unrealistic. When coupled with contract farming arrangements, unrealistic physical standards can negatively affect sustainable agricultural production. For example, it has been suggested that some organic contract farmers in the Northern part of Thailand face strict appearance standards in addition to organic standards, which cause a lot of producers to lose profits because when they could not pass the appearance standards, they received much lower prices. Because of this, many farmers were disheartened to produce in larger scale, and decided to grow organic vegetables only for their own consumption or for local markets.<sup>265</sup> Nevertheless, there seems to be some retailers which form long-term relations with producer groups, such as Lemon Farm, and try to be flexible with regards to physical appearances of agri-food products. In addition, due to the unpredictability of the weather and production conditions, sometimes Lemon Farm purchases more than it initially planned to, so as to help reduce economic problems of producers that they have long-term relations with.<sup>266</sup> Part 3 discusses in greater detail the importance of social relations as a form of informal counter-hegemonic agri-food governance,

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<sup>263</sup> Viton Panyakul, Green Net Co-operative, interviewed 23 January 2013, Bangkok.

<sup>264</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 172; Panyakul and Sakjirattikarn (2003), 135.

<sup>265</sup> Kiatsak Chatdee, ISAC, interviewed 31 October 2012; Pat Apaimul, Mae-ta farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012; Arpakorn Krueng-ngern, Mae-ta farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012; Aarat Sang-ubol, CAE, interviewed 19 December 2012; Bood-dee Piengprom, Ta-toom Natural Farmer group, interviewed 22 December 2012.

<sup>266</sup> Ms. Suwanna Langnamsank, Managing Director of the Health Society Company Limited (Lemon Farm Supermarket), interviewed 11 February 2013.

while part 4 discusses problems with retailers that sell organic agri-food products but do not necessary share counter-hegemonic ideas and goals of the SAM.

There are also some mainstream hegemonic perceptions on the side of consumers which provide obstacles to the expansion of sustainable agriculture. Due to globalised consumption patterns, urban consumers in Thailand tend to prefer cold-climate vegetables such as broccoli, which can be problematic for producer groups, because they do not have control over these seeds and local farm conditions might not be suitable.<sup>267</sup> Some of these vegetables also require a lot of water to produce, which makes them risky choices for producers, given erratic weather patterns due to climate change.<sup>268</sup> Moreover, it has been suggested by green retailers that generally, Thai consumers are used to cheap food and are not willing to pay for organic products which have higher prices due to sustainability premiums.<sup>269</sup> Nevertheless, consistent promotion of counter-hegemonic ideas (discussed in part 1) and exchanges of ideas through producer-consumer networks, as well as other types of relationships (discusses in part 3), may help to overcome these perceptions.

Some sustainable agri-food producers and retailers suggest that there are insufficient interests from domestic consumers to accommodate the expansion of sustainable agri-food production in Thailand,<sup>270</sup> so they try to solve the problem by exporting to organic and fair trade markets in the US and in Europe.<sup>271</sup> These alternative market channels, however, are not without their problems. Thai organic

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<sup>267</sup> Arpakorn Krueng-ngern, Mae-ta organic farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>268</sup> Kiatsak Chatdee, co-ordinator at ISAC, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>269</sup> Suwanna Langnamsank, Lemon Farm Supermarket, interviewed 11 February 2013 and Mr. Vitoon Panyakul, Green Net Co-operative, interviewed 23 January 2013.

<sup>270</sup> Mr. Pisit Werawaitaya, Earth Born Co. Ltd. (virgin coconut oil), email exchange date 18 January 2013 and Mrs. Piyanat Na-Nakhon, Southeast Asia Organic Co. Ltd, email exchange date 16 January 2013.

<sup>271</sup> Sompoi Jansang, Rice Fund Surin, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin.



and fair trade exporters have to engage in price competitions with countries with lower costs of production (eg. lower labour costs or special trading privileges), which provide limits to price premiums.<sup>272</sup> This is not too dissimilar to conventional international trading channels where price competitions between developing countries to export agri-food commodities put downward pressures on prices. It has been suggested that in some cases, buyers from Europe manage to bargain prices of organic products down significantly.<sup>273</sup> In addition, such long-distance trading arrangements make it difficult to establish partnership consumer-producer relations. This is because, for example, organic products are often sold under house brands so consumers did not feel loyal to particular suppliers, while retailers tend to prioritise price competitiveness.<sup>274</sup> As for fair trade, minimum prices of fair trade rice are not flexible enough to take into account fluctuations in mainstream market prices, so sometimes the minimum prices are lower than conventional market prices.<sup>275</sup> The global economic crisis of 2007/2008 also reduced demands for fair trade products in Western countries.<sup>276</sup>

Interviews of managers of producer rice mills in Surin and Yasothon also suggest some limitations of organic and fair trade markets. Rice Fund Surin, Bak-rua, and Nam-oom rice mills report that despite the premiums, they do not retain much profits and their cash flow problems led them to borrow from banks, so the

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<sup>272</sup> Chomchuan Boonrahong, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai; Sunthorn Sri-tawee of River Kwae International agri-business, quoted in Lorlohakarn (2007), 132; Mr. Pisit Werawaitaya, Earth Born Co. Ltd., email exchange date 18 January 2013; Ms. Archinya Ourapeepattanapong, Chiangmai Organic and Spa Co. Ltds, email exchange date 16 January 2013.

<sup>273</sup> Mr. Paladisai Jinapak, All Be One Thailand (export organic longan products), email exchange date 18 January 2013.

<sup>274</sup> Sunthorn Sri-tawee of River Kwae International Agri-business, quoted in Lorlohakarn (2007), 132.

<sup>275</sup> Vitoon Panyakul, Green Net Co-operative, interviewed 23 January 2013, Bangkok.

<sup>276</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 175.

interest rates add to even higher costs of production.<sup>277</sup> Bak-rua rice mill, for example, receives around 170,000 baht per year of profit after dividends are paid to members. However, it also has to spend some of the profit on community development projects, and usually has to borrow from the BAAC to purchase paddy from members.<sup>278</sup> As for Nam-oom enterprise, it had to borrow around 11 million baht from the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives (BAAC) at 6 percent interest rate to pay for paddy in 2011.<sup>279</sup> Leading members suggest that it will take them another few years to be able to purchase second-handed equipments and machineries that they needed.<sup>280</sup> Despite these financial problems, the rice mills do not seem to think they can negotiate for higher prices because they are concerned that foreign buyers will purchase from organic producer groups in other countries with lower costs of production, such as Vietnam.<sup>281</sup>

Some trade partners help the producer rice mills with their cash flow problems by agreeing to pay 50 to 80 percent of the total costs of rice in advance.<sup>282</sup> There are also other attempts to improve cash flow, such as by asking members to purchase more shares in the mills.<sup>283</sup> Rice Fund Surin, for example, suggests that the group has a four-year contract with fair trade Swiss buyers. However, such relationships are rare even in fair trade markets.<sup>284</sup> Quoting the manager of Rice Fund Surin: "what we learn from them is that business is just business".<sup>285</sup> In

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<sup>277</sup> *Ibid*, 171. Sompoi Jansang, Rice Fund Surin, interviewed 19 December 2012; Somwang Chomchuen, Bak-rua Rice mill, interviewed 24 December 2012; Kamnueng Maneebool, Nam-oom Enterprise, interviewed 23 December 2012.

<sup>278</sup> Somwang Chomchuen and Uthai Juansang, Bak-rua rice mill, interviewed 24 December 2012.

<sup>279</sup> Kamnueng Maneebool, Nam-oom enterprise, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>280</sup> Boonyuen Arj-arsa, Nam-oom enterprise, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>281</sup> Kamnueng Maneebool, Nam-oom enterprise, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>282</sup> Sompoi Jansang, Rice Fund Surin, interviewed 19 December 2012 and Boonyuen Arj-arsa, Nam-oom enterprise, interviewed 23 December 2012.

<sup>283</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 171.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid*, 173.

<sup>285</sup> Sompoi Jansang, Rice Fund Surin, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin.

addition, as part 4 discusses in greater detail, in the early 2010s, producer rice mills in Yasothon and Surin face significantly higher costs of production due to the government's paddy pledging scheme, and hence were at even greater risks of losing foreign organic and fair trade buyers.

High production and management costs of producer rice mills can be linked back not only to high labour costs (compare to some other developing countries), but also to current technologies which are not suitable for small-scale production. As suggested by relatively larger-scale rice mills such as Naso and Bak-rua, the mills have high fixed costs due to the scale of the mills. However, they had to invest in large-scale mills in the first place to meet export quality standards, such as to reduce number of broken rice. Naso, for example, has a 7,000 tons per year capacity but could only purchase 3,000 tons of paddy, so their costs of production are higher than bigger rice mills in conventional markets. Out of this amount, only one-third is organic rice which receives high premium.<sup>286</sup> In the case of Bak-rua, around 10,000 baht worth of organic rice (refers to as "cleaning costs") needs to be counted as conventional rice when the mill changes from processing conventional paddy to organic paddy.<sup>287</sup> As discussed previously, newer groups such as Kammad and the moral rice network in Yasothon try to avoid such problems by using smaller rice mills and decentralised management.

Overall, it seems that although exports of widely-traded agri-food products such as rice in organic and fair trade markets have some benefits, there are still certain limitations. At times, producer rice mills face rather serious management and financial problems. In early to mid 1990s, the Rice Fund Surin group struggled as a

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<sup>286</sup> Chutima Muangman, Naso rice mill, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>287</sup> Somwang Chomchuen, Bak-rua rice mill, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

business, partially due to low quality of produce. However, after the national Thailand Organic label was established in 1996, there was a renewed attempt to export organic rice in 1999.<sup>288</sup> Naso group also faced financial difficulties around 2006 and 2007 because of unpredictable rice prices, and also because the group could not sell off large supply of rice while having to pay high interest rate from bank loans that they borrowed to purchase paddy, resulting in 4 consecutive years of negative profits.<sup>289</sup> This further serves to explain why many NGO activists think that farmers do not earn enough income from organic rice selling to improve their livelihoods, and try to develop local markets for sustainable agri-food products, as well as encourage producers to diversify their production and produce value-added products.<sup>290</sup> As previously discussed, by doing so, farmers do not have to rely only on the sales of one or two items such as organic rice, and hence have different sources of income throughout the year. Additional measures include using the Organic Thailand standard to meet slowly blooming domestic (and regional) demands, develop Thailand's own fair trade standards,<sup>291</sup> or rely on sales based on reputation.<sup>292</sup> Some have also criticised mono-crop production of organic products for not focusing on ecological balance<sup>293</sup> and for adopting Ricardian comparative advantage mentality similar to the mainstream agri-food system.<sup>294</sup> Similarly, a study suggests that even though fair trade rice value chain in Thailand benefits all actors along the chain, it is insufficient to elevate small-scale farmers from poverty and that

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<sup>288</sup> Manager's interview, 6 November 2012, quoted in Prachason et al. (2012), 168.

<sup>289</sup> Chutima Muangman, Naso rice mill, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>290</sup> Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, interviewed 3 October 2012; Kiatsak Chatdee, ISAC, interviewed 31 October 2012; Chomchuan Boonrahong, interviewed 3 November 2012; Aarat Sang-ubol, CAE, interviewed 19 December 2012; Suwonasart Konbua, Green Net Co-operative officer, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>291</sup> Chomchuan Boonrahong, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>292</sup> Rattanawaraha (2007), 68.

<sup>293</sup> Kittithanet Rangkaworaset, 1 rai-100,000 baht project, interviewed 13 January 2013, Nonthaburi.

<sup>294</sup> Chomchuan Boonrahong, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

other activities, such as vegetable and fish production or value-added projects should be used to generate additional income.<sup>295</sup>

The problems and limitations of sustainable agricultural practices discussed in this part of the chapter can also be attributed to hegemonic governance structures that favour conventional agri-food production-distribution practices. The next part of the chapter also discusses attempts to challenge hegemonic agri-food governance structures in greater depth.

### **Part 3: Counter-hegemonic agri-food governance structures**

The previous part of the chapter has discussed different forms of direct and indirect market arrangements which give importance to values such as ecological balance and fairness.<sup>296</sup> What distinguish these production-distributional channels from conventional market channels (and neo-classical economics' ideas about free competitive markets) are different forms of governance structures which ensure that agri-food practices are embedded in counter-hegemonic values. This part of the chapter also argues that counter-hegemonic policy and legal governance structures are important to support the expansion of sustainable agriculture in Thailand. First, section 3.1 discusses counter-hegemonic market regulations and informal social relations which govern sustainable agri-food production-distribution. Section 3.2 then discusses counter-hegemonic movements' attempts to challenge hegemonic agri-food policy and legal governance structures at local, national and global levels.

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<sup>295</sup> Rebec A. Fernandez, "Agricultural Value Chain Financing in Thailand," in *Financial Access and Inclusion in the Agricultural Value Chain*, ed. Benedicto S. Bayaua (Bangkok: APRACA, 2008), 88-89.

<sup>296</sup> For a comprehensive overview, see: Prachason et al (2012) which covers groups from four provinces of Thailand (Nakhon Sawan, Karnchanaburi, Yasothon, Surin).

This section also argues that their extent of success is dependent on the political situation and the strength of civil society at that particular period of time.

### ***3.1) Governance structures of sustainable agri-food production-distribution***

There are local, national and international private and state labels that have been used to govern alternative agri-food production-distribution in Thailand. In 1993, the AAN collaborated with the private sector and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) to develop an organic certification system in Thailand to help export Jasmine rice to Europe, Canada, Australia and Japan.<sup>297</sup> The Thai state also developed the "Organic Thailand" national standard and by 2008, there were 7 types of alternative agri-food certifications in Thailand that were developed by the state and the private sector (Thai and non-Thai). However, it was estimated that over 50 percent of all organic land in Thailand were certified by international non-Thai private bodies.<sup>298</sup> In 2012, representatives from the Green Net Co-operative in Thailand were also invited to join the committee to develop a new standard for the World Fair Trade Organization.<sup>299</sup> The benefits of sustainability certifications, such as in helping to establish consumer trusts, are well recognised. However, as part 4 discusses in greater depth, relatively high costs of certification and lack of participation in the setting of standards can obstruct the expansion of SAM in Thailand and open room for co-optation of oppositions.

Aside from international and national standards, there are also local standards such as the one being used in Chiang Mai since 2001, which was developed by the Northern Organic Standard - an independent organisation founded by ISAC in 1995.

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<sup>297</sup> Rattanawaraha (2007), 11.

<sup>298</sup> National Committee to Develop Organic Agriculture (2008), 12.

<sup>299</sup> Green Net Co-operative, "About Green Net Cooperative,"  
<<http://www.greennet.or.th/about/greennet>>.

The standard was inspired by Canadian and German organic standards, as well as domestic experience and from exchanges of ideas with farmers in neighbouring countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia.<sup>300</sup> In addition to sustainable and fair certification labels, there are other forms of governance of direct trading arrangements of sustainable agri-food products. Local sustainable market arrangements have an advantage over long-distance trade in terms of making it easier for both producers and consumers to engage in continuous dialogues and to participate more equally in regulation and price setting. For Surin green market, a committee consisting of people from different areas and professions discuss fair prices for both producers and consumers based on the costs of production.<sup>301</sup> Selling quotas are also used to ensure that producers with high production capacity do not disproportionately benefit from the market.<sup>302</sup> In the case of the moral rice network, members should follow the Buddhist 5 Precepts and refrain from three main vices, which include alcohol, cigarette and gambling, in addition to organic standards.<sup>303</sup> Another similar example is Asoke, which is a well-known religious group in Thailand that produces and sells pesticide-free agri-food products among other things. Some consumers tend to trust these groups even if they do not have organic certifications.<sup>304</sup>

Many have suggested that farmers need certainty that there are markets for their organic products before they produce,<sup>305</sup> and hence there are some merits to

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<sup>300</sup> Akrapong Aanthong, "Organic Product Standards: Symbolic Declaration from Civil Society," in *NGOs for Social Benefits...and Social Processes Based on Knowledge and Wisdom*, ed. Sombat Hesakul, Supaporn Worapornpan, and Akrapong Aanthong (Bangkok: National Health Foundation, 2004), 60. (in Thai)

<sup>301</sup> Nanta Haitook, Baan Tanon Organic Herb and Vegetable Processing Group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>302</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 195.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>304</sup> Nikhom Pechpa, Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network, interviewed 23 December 2013, Yasothon

<sup>305</sup> Chutima Muangman, Naso rice mill, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

contract farming arrangements for sustainable agri-food products. The term "contract farming" receives a rather negative image among some groups in civil society in Thailand, due to many examples of contract farming arrangements where producers seem to be at significantly disadvantaged positions, as discussed in chapter 3. In addition, as discussed in part 2, physical appearance standards coupled with contract farming can discourage sustainable agri-food production. The lack of contract farming regulations in Thailand also does not inspire confidence that producer rights are sufficiently protected. Nevertheless, there are some promising contract farming arrangements of sustainable agri-food products that aim to be fair to both producers and buyers. For example, Khao Kwan Foundation suggests that many farmers appreciate financial certainty promised by contract farming arrangements, so it has agreed to work with local rice mills to develop a contract farming system to create Suphanburi province's own brand of organic rice. Rice seeds that are used were developed and selected by Khao Kwan and farmers in the programme. It has been argued that all sides benefit: 1) the foundation can promote organic production, give advice on production methods and inspects the quality; 2) farmers receive a price that is higher than the market price, and can also rely on the foundation for technical advice and for ensuring fair contracts with the local rice mills; 3) the local rice mills can create unique marketing identity which enable them to compete with larger rice mills; 4) price setting also takes into account fairness for consumers.<sup>306</sup> The first batch of organic rice was sold in October 2012 and reportedly, the costs of production was less than 3,000 baht per ton which allowed farmers the profit of 10,000 baht per ton.<sup>307</sup> Another example is Maeping Organic Company in Chiang Mai's rice contract farming arrangement, where the company advises farmers on

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<sup>306</sup> Decha Siripat, Khao Kwan Foundation, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*



production methods using probiotic micro-organisms and ensures high farm prices. The company distributes organic rice domestically and also exports to Singapore.<sup>308</sup>

There are also informal social relations and behaviours which can be seen as part of counter-hegemonic agri-food governance. The moral rice network, for example, wants to sell rice to consumers that producers "can see and connect with."<sup>309</sup> In addition to pre-payment arrangements in the form of CSA, Mae-ta group also organises farm visits and other activities to foster understanding and good relations between farmers and consumers,<sup>310</sup> which encourage continual support of the CSA scheme. Exchanges of ideas between producers and consumers can also help to reduce problems arising from unrealistic physical appearance standards. Formal business arrangements, on the other hand, can further partnership social relations within and between consumers, retailers and producers groups. Part 2 has already discussed how producer rice mills in Yasothon and Surin allow members to participate in the paddy purchasing process and pay dividends according to member shares, which encourage equitable sense of partnership and horizontal social relations. Another example is how Lemon Farm tries to go beyond contractual business arrangements by establishing long-term supportive relations with producer groups, and also work to raise consumer awareness about organic agriculture and sustainable farmer groups.<sup>311</sup> A study in 2012 makes a similar suggestion that alternative markets where values such as health, the environment, and self-reliance are embedded in the market mechanisms, help to establish new social relations

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<sup>308</sup> Suchit Nokham, Maeping Organic Company, interviewed 2 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>309</sup> Jirapan Meesap, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>310</sup> Arpakorn Krueng-ngern, Mae-ta organic farmer, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>311</sup> Summary from the interview of Ms. Suwanna Langnamsank, Lemon Farm Supermarket, 11 February 2013.

which govern the markets.<sup>312</sup> In this sense, consumption can be seen as having the potential to introduce changes in society through altering social relations. However, the report also recognises that there are other macro-level structures such as laws and policies that need to be address.<sup>313</sup> This issue is discussed in the next section.

As part 1 has discussed, some people in the movement see sustainable agriculture's way of thinking not only as counter-hegemonic ideas regarding agricultural production, but also as counter-hegemonic ideas which re-think relationships between humans, society and the ecological system. For example, an organic farmer in Surin suggests that sustainable agriculture for him means changing one's attitude; from being a conventional farmer who was willing to kill insects and go against the seasons to produce for profits, to a more patient farmer who tries to understand the ecological system, and are willing to allow some pests in the spirit of sharing and co-existence.<sup>314</sup> A few other people in the movement also emphasise the importance of introducing counter-hegemonic changes at the individual level (not just for farmers but also consumers), which lead to changes in how individuals conduct social relations, which then affect society as a whole.<sup>315</sup> For example, Phra Promma who helps the moral rice network in Yasothon argues that to challenge the capitalist system and patron-client relations, one needs knowledge and mindfulness so that one can use technology appropriately and not be led by consumerism.<sup>316</sup> Similarly, the moral rice network emphasises on changing individual behaviours to raise quality of life, such as by controlling gambling habits to curb spending and to

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<sup>312</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 285.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid*, 286.

<sup>314</sup> Pakphum Inpan, Tamor Natural Farmer group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid*; Decha Siripat, interviewed 14 October 2012; Phra Promma Suphatto, interviewed 23 December 2012.

<sup>316</sup> Phra Promma Suphatto, Thamma-ruamjai temple, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

promote saving.<sup>317</sup> Dhamma (Buddhist teachings) is also seen as an important component to curb individuals' greed and prevent co-optation of farmer leaders.<sup>318</sup> Part 4 of this chapter also discusses co-optations of opposition, and how attempts to alter individual's ideas and social relations using Buddhist terms may cause misinterpretation that hinder support for the SAM.

It is not an easy task to alter individuals' way of thinking and form counter-hegemonic social relations due to deep-rooted hegemonic ideas and practice. It has been noted by sustainable agriculture promoters, for example, how the individualistic culture and mainstream market relations are ingrained in farmers' minds, especially those in the areas which have easy access to globalised capitalist markets such as in the Central plain of Thailand. However, in some areas, social relations such as community and family ties can still play significant roles to ignite interests in sustainable agriculture.<sup>319</sup> Another point to note is that sustainable producer groups are in different positions to establish supportive social relations with other groups in society. As part 2 has discussed, relatively successful groups benefited from building alliances with other groups in society, such as academics and the media. The moral rice network and Kammad group, for example, benefited from national media's attention on their leading members, which help them to establish relationships with consumers that help their economic situations. In the case of the moral rice network, TV Burapha has interviewed and gave an award to Mr. Kankamkla Pilanoi - a relatively young farmer who works to develop traditional rice strands - as well as helped to find market channels for the moral rice producer group.<sup>320</sup> As for

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<sup>317</sup> Prachason et al (2012), 128-129.

<sup>318</sup> Decha Siripat, Khao Kwan Foundation, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>319</sup> Suwonasart Konbua, Green Net Co-operative, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>320</sup> Kankamkla Pilanoi, Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

Kammad, aside from receiving help from ALRO, one of its leading member also sometimes receives media coverage which help the group to find new customers.<sup>321</sup>

Some producer groups, however, may not be as fortunate in terms of their ability to build supportive networks.

This section has discussed the importance of counter-hegemonic market regulations and social relations governing agri-food production-distribution. However, these governance structures are insufficient if one wants to promote sustainable agriculture in larger scales, or to challenge and transform the hegemonic agri-food system. Local, national, and global policies, as well as legal frameworks, are undeniably important governance structures which shape the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand. For example, many people have suggested that the irrigation physical infrastructure in the Central plain of Thailand was built to support mono-crop rice paddy, which is incompatible with diversified ecologically sustainable agricultural production, as smaller-scale irrigation are arguably more suitable.<sup>322</sup> If one does not change the national policy framework which focuses on building large-scale irrigation projects that encourage centralisation of control over water resource, then larger-scale transitions toward sustainable agricultural production methods will be difficult to achieve. The next section discusses the SAM's attempts to build counter-hegemonic agri-food policy and legal governance structures.

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<sup>321</sup> Boonsong Martkhao, Kammad group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>322</sup> Such suggestion has been made by, for example, Mr. Kosit Panpiemrat, former Deputy Secretary General of NESDB and politician who had hold various high-level posts in the bureaucracy, quoted in CorpWatch-Thailand and BioThai, "Critiques of the Twin Policies: For National or Corporate Benefits?," in *CP and Thai Agriculture* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2008), 149-150. (in Thai)

### ***3.2) Counter-hegemonic agri-food policy and legal governance structures***

This section first discusses the Thai state's promotion of sustainable agriculture before focusing on the pilot programme to promote sustainable agriculture which was under the control of the AAN. Then, it discusses counter-hegemonic attempts to shape the legal structures governing the agri-food system, particularly relating to the governance of seeds, intellectual property rights and the signing of free trade agreements.

#### ***The Thai State's promotion of sustainable agriculture***

There are some state offices at national and local levels, as well as civil servants, who are sympathetic to diversified farms and sustainable agriculture.<sup>323</sup> In the early 2010s, this includes ALRO which works with Kammad group in Yasothon to expand sustainable agricultural production,<sup>324</sup> as well as the Thailand Research Fund (TRF) which gives some funding to participatory research projects, such as to preserve and develop traditional rice strands.<sup>325</sup> TRF funding, however, is inconsistent and is dependent on the government's policy direction. Some sustainable farmer groups also recognise the benefits of building alliances with local administration offices to promote organic farming, such as Tamor group in Surin.<sup>326</sup> One former governor of Surin implemented serious sustainable agriculture development policy for six

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<sup>323</sup> An example include Dr. Pratueng Narintarangkul Na Ayuthya, Chief Executive of Farmers' Reconstruction and Development Fund in Chiang Mai, interviewed 2 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>324</sup> Boonsong Martkhao, Kammad group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>325</sup> See Daoruang Puechphol et al., *A Complete Report of the Research Project to Study Traditional Rice Genetics to Expand Organic Rice Production in Baan Kudhin, Baan Kammad, Baan Nonyang in Tambol Kammad, Ampur Kudchum, Yasothon province* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2010). (in Thai)

<sup>326</sup> Pakphum Inpan, Tamor Natural Farmer group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

years,<sup>327</sup> and had a lot of positive influence on the SAM in the Northeast,<sup>328</sup> but after he retired there was a change in policy.<sup>329</sup>

Mae-ta group in Chiang Mai interestingly managed to create supportive political space that greatly enhance their work by supporting one of its member to a local administrative position. This political space, however, is available because of more than a decade of civil society's pressure for the Thai state to decentralise power.<sup>330</sup> By 2012, Mr. Kanoksak Duangkaewruan from Ampur Mae-ta was elected three times as Chief Executive of the Sub-district Administrative Organisation (SAO), and had used his 9 years in office to focus on natural resource management, which includes the promotion of sustainable agriculture and policies to curb negative social and ecological effects of conventional farming.<sup>331</sup> The SAO utilises resources of the bureaucracy and academics to form 5 to 10 year development plans and zoning maps to manage negative externalities, particularly from animal farms. In addition, it provides funding for farmers to adjust their production to reduce negative impact on the environment, and encourage sustainable agri-food processing activities to promote local food security and job creations.<sup>332</sup> The case of Mae-ta is interesting because, from past experience, many in the SAM found that expansions of sustainable agricultural activities tend to depend on government and other private external organisations' budget and projects, which can be rather inconsistent.<sup>333</sup> With

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<sup>327</sup> Mr. Kasemsak Sanpoch, former Surin governor, interviewed 21 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>328</sup> Aarat Sang-ubol, CAE, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>329</sup> Kasemsak Sanpoch, interviewed 21 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>330</sup> Kanoksak Duangkaewruan, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid*; Rungroj Kajadroka, Tamor Natural Farmer group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

the support of the SAO which receives a budget of 15 million baht per year, Mae-ta is able to implement longer-term plans.<sup>334</sup>

There have also been attempts to introduce sustainable agriculture as part of Thailand's national development agenda, notably in the 8th National and Economic Social Development (NESD) plan written in 1996. The plan was steered by public intellectuals such as Dr. Prawase Wasi to reflect people-centered development philosophy, and incorporated some ideas and feedback from civil society groups such as the AAN.<sup>335</sup> With regards to sustainable agriculture, the plan explicitly suggests that 20 percent of agricultural land in the country or at least 25 million rai should be transformed to sustainable agricultural areas.<sup>336</sup> As the next sub-section discusses, there were some resistance from the bureaucracy and the plan was never implemented, which led the AAN to demand for the national pilot programme for sustainable agriculture to be managed by civil society groups in the network.<sup>337</sup>

It is not uncommon in Thailand for some national policy plans to be announced but are not seriously followed through. In 2001, the Thai Rak Thai government announced a policy to develop Thailand as a center of organic agricultural production, but without significant practical plans of implementation.<sup>338</sup> Another state-led plan was the first National Strategic Plan to Develop Organic Agriculture (2008-2011), which was criticised for not involving civil society and other organic agriculture stakeholders.<sup>339</sup> An evaluation at the end of the plan suggests that there are still a lot of unaddressed problems such as insufficient

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<sup>334</sup> Mr. Kanoksak Duangkaewruan, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>335</sup> Mr. Decha Siripat, interviewed 8 August 2001, quoted in Unno (2003), 157-158.

<sup>336</sup> Siripat, "The Assembly of the Poor," (2011), 96-97.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

<sup>338</sup> Rattanawaraha (2007), 217.

<sup>339</sup> Panyakul and Poomsak (2008), 30.

knowledge on organic farming in the country and the lack of databases on organic agriculture,<sup>340</sup> which call into question the state's seriousness in the promotion of organic agriculture. Aside from domestic civil society's demands, the Thai state sometimes show interests in sustainable agriculture because of transnational influence. However, such interests are limited to special projects to promote sustainable agriculture, usually in collaboration with organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), NGOs and farmer groups, and are based in marginalised land areas rather than prime agricultural land areas.<sup>341</sup> Other important criticisms include how the state does not provide support for farmers during the transitional period to sustainable agriculture, nor promote consumer demands for organic products in the country.<sup>342</sup>

Another reason why the Thai state gives some funding to promote sustainable agriculture is because of King Bhumipol's support of diversified agriculture and sufficiency ideas. For example, the royalist government established after the 2006 coup d'état (2006 to 2007) was led by a Prime Minister who was a former member of the King's privy council, and tried to follow some sufficiency economy ideas and provided budget for sustainable agricultural projects, as well as local sage centers which help to propagate sustainable agricultural techniques.<sup>343</sup> The King has also founded the Chaipattana Foundation, which aims to help citizens through development projects in ways that are more flexible and faster than the bureaucracy,

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<sup>340</sup> "National Strategic Plan to Develop Organic Agriculture 2013-2016 Draft," Received from Ms. Wibulwan Wannamolee, Senior Specialist on Agri-Food Standards, National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards Office, 31 January 2013, 12-15. (in Thai)

<sup>341</sup> Unno (2003), 185.

<sup>342</sup> Nanthiya Hutanuwat, "A Strategy to Expand Organic Jasmine Rice Production. A Paper for the 5th National Academic Conference on Agricultural System 5: Alternative Energy and Food Security for Humanity, 2-4 July 2009, Ubol International Hotel, Ubolratchathani province" (Ubolratchathani, 2009), 129. (in Thai)

<sup>343</sup> Rattanawaraha (2007), 217.



in line with the King's sufficiency philosophy and his other development ideas.<sup>344</sup> The effects of the monarchy's involvement in the promotion of sustainable agriculture, however, are rather complicated, as part 4 of the chapter discusses in greater detail.

There are many explanations for the lack of progress in the state's promotion of sustainable agriculture. As chapter 3 discussed, the Thai state generally promotes the hegemonic capitalist agri-food system. When the bureaucracy has to promote sustainable agriculture, it focuses on quantifiable outcome rather than quality, such as the number of households that they can claim to be covered by their projects.<sup>345</sup> An organic farmer, who is often invited by the bureaucracy in Yasothon to train other farmers, also makes a similar point and suggests that the bureaucracy generally does not care to encourage farmers to form self-help sustainable agriculture groups nor to do post-training follow-ups.<sup>346</sup> In addition, it has been noted that civil servants tend to look at the promotion of organic agriculture as being the same as promoting certain organic inputs, rather than to change the system as a whole or to study agro-ecological methods. Hence, they tend to adopt a one-day training approach in organic agricultural methods and provide organic input handouts, instead of devising more effective longer-term participatory training process.<sup>347</sup> Such an approach can also partly be attributed to compartmentalised agricultural education and knowledge internalised by Thai civil servants, which was discussed in chapter 3. In many ways,

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<sup>344</sup> In 2014, the King is the Honourary President of the foundation and the crown princess is the committee chair, <<http://www.chaipat.or.th/chaipat/index.php/th/about-the-chai-pattana-foundation/about-us>>, retrieved 10 July 2014.

<sup>345</sup> For example, see: Sompan Techa-artik, *Diversified Farms Save Lives and Dhamma: Self-Reliance and Growing Wealth in the Soil Sustainably* (Bangkok: Research and Development Institute, Khon-Kaen University, 1995), 174-175 quoted in Unno (2003), 186.

<sup>346</sup> Mr. Lun Saneh-ha, Naso organic farmer member, interviewed 25 December 2012.

<sup>347</sup> Panyakul and Sakjirattikarn (2003), 145.

such interpretations of sustainable agricultural production can also be considered a form of co-optation of oppositions, which is discussed in greater detail in part 4.

The previous part of the chapter has discussed how organic agriculture is a knowledge-based production which requires a lot of supporting research that the state ought to encourage,<sup>348</sup> as the private sector and civil society in Thailand tend to have limitation in terms of funding.<sup>349</sup> However, the Thai state generally spends little in research - only 0.24 percent of GDP according to a study in 2008 - in comparison to 2 percent in developed countries.<sup>350</sup> Research on organic agriculture accounted for 20 million baht or 0.12 percent of the research budget of the whole country.<sup>351</sup> The TRF, for example, funded Ratchapat Utaradit University to research on low-costs machineries suitable for the production of organic rice.<sup>352</sup> Aside from some examples of promising research projects, criticisms remain that there is still no national-level research network which equitably distribute benefits or guarantee access to all types of stakeholders,<sup>353</sup> and not enough attention is being paid to participatory technological research.<sup>354</sup>

The Thai state's half-hearted promotion of sustainable agriculture is revisited in part 4 of this chapter, which discusses some attempts by the state to promote sustainable agriculture as possible co-optation of oppositions. In the next subsection, the discussion is shifted to civil society groups' attempt to wrestle for control

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<sup>348</sup> *Ibid*, 145.

<sup>349</sup> For example, Ms. Akinee Jiwattanapaiboon (B.Pharm), Marketing Manager of Xondur Thai Organic Food Co. Ltd., email exchange date 21 February 2013, suggests that the company have limited capacity to help train producers in large scale.

<sup>350</sup> Vitoon Panyakul and Pattarawadee Poomsak, *A Report on the Status of Research and Innovation Relating to Organic Agriculture in Thailand* (Bangkok: National Innovation Agency, 2008), 2. (in Thai)

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>352</sup> Karnda Boonthuan, "Technology That Changes Paddy Fields," *Bangkok Business News*, January 02, 2014.

<sup>353</sup> Panyakul and Poomsak (2008), 4-6.

<sup>354</sup> Panyakul and Sakjirattikarn (2003), 145.

of some of the government's budget to promote sustainable agriculture in Thailand by themselves.

*The AAN's national pilot programme to develop sustainable agriculture*

As previously discussed, the 8th NESD plan supports the transformation of 20 percent of agricultural land in the country to sustainable agricultural areas. Nevertheless, practical plans and implementation of the goal were under the full control of the bureaucracy.<sup>355</sup> Some civil servants in the Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives clearly suggested that they disapproved of the goal and tried to resist by not putting the agenda in practical plans.<sup>356</sup> As discussed in chapter 3, the bureaucracy generally believes in mainstream Green Revolution production methods. The AAN tried to follow up on this issue and joined the Assembly of the Poor - a loosely structured umbrella organisation established in 1995 to represent voices and demands of different marginalised groups of people in Thailand - to increase its bargaining power.<sup>357</sup>

In early 1997, the Assembly of the Poor staged a much larger protest than usual where 20,000 people camped outside of the Government House for 99 days. They presented 125 demands to the government, mostly regarding conflicts over the usage of land and forests. The Assembly of the Poor managed to gain some concessions from the Thai state, but some of these concessions were revoked later on.<sup>358</sup> As part of the Assembly of the Poor, the AAN proposed the establishment of a fund to promote sustainable agriculture to the Chavalit Yongchaiyut government in

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<sup>355</sup> Lienchamroon and Yaimuang (2011), 295.

<sup>356</sup> Decha Siripat, interviewed 8 August 2001, quoted in Unno (2003), 159.

<sup>357</sup> Siripat, "The Assembly of the Poor," (2011), 96-97.

<sup>358</sup> Phongpaichit and Baker (1995), 408-411.

December 1996.<sup>359</sup> However, the establishment of a national fund to support sustainable agriculture is a lengthy process which requires subsidiary laws to be passed, so the AAN changed its demand and asked for a fund for a "pilot programme" to develop sustainable agriculture instead<sup>360</sup> because according to the 8th NESD plan, citizens have the right to propose development projects and manage the budget themselves.<sup>361</sup> In addition, the AAN thought it would be more efficient to operate outside of conventional bureaucratic structures.<sup>362</sup>

The Chavalit government approved a 950 million baht budget for a four year pilot programme to promote sustainable agriculture, to be implemented between 1998 and 2001.<sup>363</sup> There were special circumstances which explained why the Chavalit government made some concessions to the Assembly of the Poor: 1) the party relied on votes from poor Northeastern farmers who formed a major part of the Assembly of the Poor movement; 2) the government's legitimacy and credibility were almost non-existent during the Asian Economic crisis of 1997, so the government felt the need to do whatever they could to appease the population.<sup>364</sup> Nevertheless, the succeeding Democrat government led by Chuan Leekpai (November 1997 to February 2001) adopted a conservative stand and revoked most of the concessions made to the Assembly of the Poor. The government could not, however, cancel the pilot programme because it had already been approved by

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<sup>359</sup> Summary of initial demands of the Assembly of the Poor, 14 January 1997, and Decha Siripat, interviewed 8 August 2003, quoted in Anusorn Unno, *Social Movements for Common Resource Rights in the Thai Society: Alternative Agriculture in the Context of Property Rights System* (Nonthaburi: Alternative Agriculture Fair Committee, 2004), 231-232. (in Thai)

<sup>360</sup> The Pilot Project to Develop Sustainable Agriculture for Small-scale Farmers, *Lessons and Experiences of Sustainable Agricultural Development by Farmers and Community Organisations: The Case of the Pilot Project to Develop Sustainable Agriculture for Small-Scale Farmers* (Nonthaburi: Sustainable Agriculture foundation Thailand (SATHAI), 2004), 6. (in Thai)

<sup>361</sup> Decha Siripat, interviewed 8 August 2001, quoted in Unno (2003), 159.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid* and The Pilot Project to Develop Sustainable Agriculture for Small-scale Farmers (2004), 5.

<sup>363</sup> Unno (2004), 233.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid*, 235-236.

various departments, so the government slowed it down; it took three years for the cabinet to finally approve the funding of 633 million baht to be implemented between 2001 and 2003.<sup>365</sup>

The pilot programme operated in 9 areas in 37 provinces, covering 27,100 rai of land.<sup>366</sup> It aimed to encourage self-reliance of small-scale farmers through sustainable agriculture and sustainable management of coastal resources to ensure food security, environmental sustainability, and economic security at household and community levels. The fund received from the government was used to develop production, processing and marketing techniques of sustainable agri-food products, as well as to support organisations and networks of small-scale farmers, and to campaign for the public's support.<sup>367</sup> The fund was used in different ways according to local needs, such as to sponsor farmer training, to build small-scale irrigation,<sup>368</sup> and to sponsor research on traditional rice strands.<sup>369</sup> Surin green market, for example, received some funding from the pilot programme between 2002 and 2003, and started to become more established by 2003.<sup>370</sup> Rice Fund Surin Organic Agriculture Co-operative also received some funding from the pilot programme in 2002 to build a 24 tons capacity rice mill and 500 tons capacity warehouse.<sup>371</sup> A self-evaluation report suggests that the pilot programme yielded positive benefits and allowed more farmers to make transitions to sustainable agriculture. For example, surveys indicated that after the programme, farmers in the network used less chemical fertilisers (from 65.6 percent to 36.7 percent) and instead use organic

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<sup>365</sup> *Ibid*, 237 and Decha Siripat, interviewed 8 August 2003, quoted in Unno (2004), 238.

<sup>366</sup> The Pilot Project to Develop Sustainable Agriculture for Small-scale Farmers (2004), 12.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>369</sup> Rojanaprai Wong et al. (2004), 73.

<sup>370</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 177

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid*, 167-168.

fertilisers. In addition, households had greater food security due to diversified farms.<sup>372</sup>

The pilot programme should be credited as a significant step for the SAM, as it is the first time the movement was able to push for some decentralisation of the state's developmental budget to civil society. In addition, the funding has helped to propagate counter-hegemonic ideas and sustainable production-distribution, at least in the AAN circles and within the limits of the budget. However, the pilot programme had limitations not only in terms of budget, but also in terms of implementation time and personnel, not to mention that they were closely monitored by the Thai government for any slight mistakes that would allow the pilot programme's work to be discredited.<sup>373</sup> The pilot programme which focused on funding small practical projects also left macro-level hegemonic governance structures rather untouched. The next sub-section discusses some other attempts by the AAN to challenge hegemonic legal governance structures.

### *Counter-hegemonic attempts to shape legal agri-food governance*

In the 1990s and early 2010s, AAN core groups and other environmental movements, such as BioThai and Green Peace, engage in national and international campaigns to hinder legal governance structures which support the hegemonic agri-food system. The following paragraphs discuss a few important examples of such campaigns, which are related to the governance of seeds, intellectual property rights, and the signing of free trade agreements (FTAs). There are also other initiatives,

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<sup>372</sup> The Pilot Project to Develop Sustainable Agriculture for Small-scale Farmers (2004), 89-90.

<sup>373</sup> Mr. Decha Siripat, for example, recounts how a certain politician threatened AAN leaders with prison if the usage of the fund was slightly out of line, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

such as to pass Farmer Rights law and laws to protect contract farmers,<sup>374</sup> but they are beyond the scope of this thesis. These examples suggest that the sustainable agriculture movement has tried to challenge some hegemonic governance structures at domestic as well as at global levels, although there are other hegemonic governance structures which the movement have not addressed.

The SAM in Thailand has strong interests in the issues of biodiversity and patents of seeds since the early 1990s. Spurred by the signing of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1992 and attempts to patent a traditional Thai plant by a Japanese firm, NGOs and academics formed a Network of the Right of Thai Local Wisdom in 1994 to support farmer and community rights over biological resource and traditional wisdom.<sup>375</sup> In 1998, there was also a movement against the patent of Jasmine rice strand (Jasmati) by an American company.<sup>376</sup> Owing to strong interests from civil society on the issues of seeds and intellectual property rights, a committee was set up by the Ministry of Commerce in 1998 to gather public opinions, such as from academics and NGOs, regarding the intellectual property rights regime of the TRIPS agreement that would be in effect in 1999.<sup>377</sup> As a result, on 30 November 1998, a formal letter from the Department of Intellectual Property, Ministry of Commerce, was submitted to the Thai representative at the WTO to object clause 27.3b of TRIPS which supports property rights regime of seeds along the lines of the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plant in 1991 (UPOV

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<sup>374</sup> Paisit Panichkul, Law lecturer at Chiang Mai University, interviewed 7 November 2012.

<sup>375</sup> Tasnee Weerakan, NGO activist, interviewed 27 July 2003, quoted in Unno (2003), 161-162.

<sup>376</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon, "Lessons from the Struggle over Plant Genetics Protection under the WTO's TRIPS (originally Published in 2002 as a TDRI Annual Conference Paper)," in *Reform the Agricultural Sector for Food Security: Analysis and Practical Policies* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2011), 73. (in Thai)

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

1991).<sup>378</sup> Moreover, through India's leadership, Thailand was among a group of countries which includes Brazil, Bolivia, Peru and Venezuela, that submitted a paper to the TRIPS Council of the WTO calling for amendments in TRIPS to harmonise it with the CBD.<sup>379</sup>

The attempts to amend the TRIPs agreement was unsuccessful. However, at the domestic level, the AAN and the Assembly of the Poor successfully pushed for a law to protect local plant genetics in 1999,<sup>380</sup> which is seen by the AAN as a compromise which balance between the interests of agri-businesses to commercialise seeds, and farmer rights to seeds along the lines of UPOV 1978 and CBD.<sup>381</sup> Other notable attempts to create counter-hegemonic governance structures of biological resources, agri-food products and local wisdom, include transnational collaborations with countries such as India and the Philippines to develop Community Intellectual Right law,<sup>382</sup> and transnational collaborations to support the extension of geographical indicators (GI) from alcohols to cover agri-food products in 2001.<sup>383</sup>

As both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces operate continuously to shape their terrains, counter-hegemonic gains should not be considered permanent. Chapter 3 section 1.1 discussed civil society's successful attempts to block the commercial plantation and open-field testing of genetically modified (GM) seeds, but also suggested that there are renewed attempts to introduce pro-GM agri-food

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<sup>378</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

<sup>379</sup> Vandana Shiva, "The Future of Food: Countering Globalisation and Recolonisation of Indian Agriculture," *Futures* 36 (2004), 718.

<sup>380</sup> Tasnee Weerakan, NGO activist, interviewed 27 July 2003, quoted in Unno (2003), 161-162.

<sup>381</sup> Lienchamroon, "Lessons from the Struggle," (2011), 69.

<sup>382</sup> Anusorn Unno, *Farmer Rights in Thailand: Learning Process and Agricultural System Development. A Research under Thai Human Rights Project*. (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2002), 70, quoted in Unno (2004), 280.

<sup>383</sup> Lienchamroon, "Lessons from the Struggle," (2011), 74-75.



regulations in Thailand, as recently as in 2014.<sup>384</sup> Even though civil society groups managed to halt open-field testing of GM seeds before a biosafety law can be put in place, at the time of writing, there are still some concerns that agri-businesses and the Thai bureaucracy will rush to pass a careless biosafety law.<sup>385</sup> In 2013, the Department of Agriculture also proposed a new law to replace the 1999 law governing the use of plants genetics, which will be more in accordance with UPOV 1991. There are concerns that the new law will increase the power of agri-businesses, and it is also seen partially as a result of lobbying attempts during the Thai-EU FTA negotiation in the early 2010s.<sup>386</sup> This issue was also discussed in section 2.2 of chapter 3.

Since events are still unfolding at the time of writing, it is difficult to draw a conclusion. However, from historical experience, it is plausible to suggest that counter-hegemonic gains can be reversed depending on the strength of counter-hegemonic forces and political space at particular periods of time. For example, it has been noted that before 2005, civil society groups were not strong enough to inspect agri-food related clauses in Thailand's FTAs with China and Australia. However, in 2005, civil society groups consisting not only of the AAN but also 11 other networks such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) patients and four-region slum network, were strong enough to successfully block the US-Thailand FTA in Chiang Mai, which would have imposed strict pro-business property rights regime in Thailand.<sup>387</sup> After the coup d'état in Thailand in early 2014, some groups

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<sup>384</sup> Bangkok Post Online, "Fresh Struggle Kicks off to Halt GM Crops," October 24, 2014.

<sup>385</sup> BioThai, "Civil Society Is on Guard against the Passing of GMO Law That Will Benefit Transnational Seed Companies," January 21, 2015. (in Thai)

<sup>386</sup> From many news report and Witoon Lienchamroon's interview in "Civil Society Disagrees with Changing of the Law to Aid Seed Companies," *Prachathai Online News*, March 01, 2013. (in Thai)

<sup>387</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon, "Fighting FTA: the Thai Experience," in *Reform the Agricultural Sector for Food Security: Analysis and Practical Policies* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2011), 311-314. (in Thai)

such as FTA Watch were concerned that the military government would push through the Thailand-EU FTA in hope to improve its international image without consulting civil society. However, at the time of writing it is too early to assess. In addition to the discussion of co-optation in chapter 4, part 4 of this chapter also discusses how political polarisation in Thailand has weakened counter-hegemonic forces in the agri-food system in Thailand.

Many attempts to lobby for counter-hegemonic changes at the national governance structures have so far been rather unsuccessful, such as the campaign to increase tax and control over agricultural chemicals. AAN activists believe that this is due to lobbying power of Thai and non-Thai agri-businesses, and suggest that the influence of these companies extended to all governments and all political parties.<sup>388</sup> Some activists have admitted that the AAN needs to expand their allies to further increase their bargaining power.<sup>389</sup> Other reactions, however, include the perception that perhaps it is better to spend time and effort on building alternative agri-food production-distribution channels rather than hoping to change the Thai state's policies and legal structures.<sup>390</sup> On the one hand, this sounds like a rational strategy for individuals, but on the other hand, it implies the acceptance that sustainable agriculture is just an "alternative" to serve niche markets, rather than a counter-hegemonic possibility that can lead to the transformation of the mainstream agri-food system.

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<sup>388</sup> Decha Siripat, interviewed 14 October 2012, Nonthaburi. Also see: Witoon Lienchamroon, "Behind the Movement to Extend Agricultural Chemicals Registration," in *Reform the Agricultural Sector for Food Security: Analysis and Practical Policies* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2011), 55-58. (in Thai)

<sup>389</sup> Lienchamroon and Yaimuang (2011), 296.

<sup>390</sup> For example, as suggested by Vitoon Panyakul, Green Net Co-operative, interviewed 23 January 2013 and Kankamkla Pilanoi, Thammasa-ruamjai network, interviewed 23 December 2012.

As previously discussed, there were some attempts to challenge global governance structures such as TRIPs in collaboration with other countries. However, other aspects of hegemonic global governance are rarely discussed, such as the lack of regulations over speculations of agricultural commodities and the World Bank's framework regarding land investments in developing countries. Although these issues might seem rather far-removed from immediate problems in the agri-food system in Thailand, they are nevertheless significant elements of the hegemonic global agri-food order which Thailand is a part of, as discussed in chapter 3. One may suggest that the SAM in Thailand can try to affect changes at the global governance level through transnational social movements such as La Vía Campesina. However, as the next chapter will discuss, Thai members of La Vía Campesina which include the Assembly of the Poor and the Northern Peasants Federation (part of the land reform movement), face some difficulties participating in the international arena due to language barriers and other reasons.<sup>391</sup> In the next part of the chapter, grey areas between hegemony and counter-hegemony, as well as co-optation of oppositions, are explored as obstacles which limit counter-hegemonic potential of the SAM.

#### **Part 4: Grey areas and co-optation of oppositions**

Part 4 of the previous chapter discussed some examples of co-optation of oppositions in the agri-food system in Thailand, and explored how political polarisation and populist policies can also be seen as co-optation of oppositions. This part of the chapter continues the discussion by focusing on examples of co-optation of oppositions which are relevant to the SAM, as well as grey areas between hegemony

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<sup>391</sup> Arat Sang-ubol, CAE, interviewed 19 December 2012; Mr. Direk Kong-ngern and Mr. Montri Bua-loi, Baan Pong, Tambol Mae-faeg, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

and counter-hegemony. First, section 4.1 evaluates some critiques of localism and sustainable agriculture which portray them as conservative forces. This section argues that while it is important to guard against conservative interpretations and practices, open-minded analysis beyond the modernisation world view allow one to see that there can be some counter-hegemonic potential to localism and sustainable agriculture. Section 4.2 discusses grey areas and co-optation of oppositions by the private sector in sustainable agri-food markets. Lastly, section 4.3 considers the Thai state's promotion of sustainable agriculture from the light of co-optation of oppositions. It also discusses the effects of the paddy pledging scheme - a policy of co-optation of oppositions discussed in the previous chapter - on producer rice mills in Yasothon and Surin.

#### ***4.1) Counter-hegemonic extent of localism and sustainable agriculture***

As part 1 has discussed, Thai localist ideas have been influential in the building up of counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand, and have inspired many people to search for an alternative development paradigm which is suitable to the Thai context. However, as the following paragraphs elaborate, Thai localism and sufficiency ideas have been criticised by some academics as backward conservative forces which are not relevant to contemporary Thailand. Such interpretations of Thai localism are sometimes mapped onto the SAM, and unintentionally aid polarised political and rural development discourses in Thailand. These polarised discourses are problematic, and can be seen as a form of co-optation which benefits Thai political elites by distracting the population from structural problems underlying the mainstream agri-food system. This section first evaluates some main critiques of Thai localism, and suggests that their interpretations tend to over-simplify Thai

localist ideas. Nevertheless, these critiques serve as useful tools to warn against conservative interpretations and practical translations of localist ideas that limit their counter-hegemonic potential. The section then argues that despite some conservative examples and elements, Thai localism should still be credited as attempts to build national-popular strategies to rally Thais behind counter-hegemonic projects. In addition, the SAM can be recognised as part of global counter-hegemonic forces which try to challenge the hegemonic capitalist agriculture and food system, rather than seen as an insular movement that tries to retreat to the past.

Some scholars have inferred that Thai localism and sufficiency imply advocacies of autarkic closed communities that are hostile to market relations.<sup>392</sup> For example, Hewison (2002) interprets localism as a strategy to encourage farmers to "de-link from market economy and return to subsistence" and suggests that these are "backward-looking strategies."<sup>393</sup> However, as part 1 has discussed, the community culture school of thought advocates using local wisdom and resources to help people integrate into national and international economy, and it does not imply that they have to develop in isolation without help from modern ideas and technology.<sup>394</sup> Despite the emphasis on community and local-level development, localist ideas do not oppose trade and collaborations with other parts of society.<sup>395</sup> In addition, autarkic sufficiency would contradict the Buddhist belief in moderation. As for

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<sup>392</sup> For example: Andrew Walker, "Environmental Issues in Thailand: A Rural Perspective," in *Thailand's Economic Recovery: Proceedings of the National Thai Studies Centre Annual Thailand Update 2004*, ed. Cavan Hogue (Singapore: ISEAS, 2006), 78-80; Kevin Hewison, "Responding to Economic Crisis: Thailand's Localism," in *Reforming Thai Politics*, ed. Duncan McCargo (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2002), 149.

<sup>393</sup> Hewison (2002), 149 and 156-157.

<sup>394</sup> Phongpaichit (2005), 138.

<sup>395</sup> For example, see: Apichai Puntasen, "Applying Self-Sufficient Economy to Systematically Solve Poverty," in *Dhamma Economics: A Collection of Speeches of Distinguished Professors from the Economics Department, Thammasart University* (Bangkok: OpenBooks, 2010), 93. (in Thai)

sufficiency ideas, the King's speeches suggest that full sufficiency - that every family must produce all the basic needs for themselves - is impossible.<sup>396</sup>

Another popular critique, relating to the first, is that Thai localism infers anti-globalisation, anti-outsiders, anti-urban and anti-industrialisation sentiments. Rigg and Nattapoolwat (2001), for example, describes NGO activists, journalists and academics sympathetic to localism as having "fears of globalization" and suggests that localists are trying to retreat to "traditional forms of production"<sup>397</sup> even though globalisation open up economic opportunities for rural people.<sup>398</sup> The study, however, did not give specific reference to localist authors who made such arguments. Similarly, Hewison (2002) suggests how localist discourses draw both conservative and radical Thais together to oppose "globalization, neo-liberalism, and capitalist industrialisation"<sup>399</sup> and that "there is no place for large-scale industrialization or urbanization"<sup>400</sup> for localists. Moreover, the study suggests that anti-urban bias can and does preclude political alliances across the supposed rural-urban split.<sup>401</sup> On the contrary, localist scholars such as Prawase Wasi clearly advocate building alliances with other sectors in Thai society, including the state and the private sector.<sup>402</sup> Anan Ganjanapan, for example, emphasises on how communities can adapt over time and are not necessarily geographically based. In

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<sup>396</sup> The King's birthday royal speech in 1998, quoted in Warr (2007), 3; Royal speeches in 2007, 2008, and 2011 quoted in Suthep Udomrat, "Self-Sufficiency Philosophy," in *Safety and Stability through Self-Sufficiency Economy*, ed. Pitaya Wongkul (Bangkok: Withithat Institute, 2008), 74 and 77.

<sup>397</sup> Rigg and Nattapoolwat (2001), 956.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 957.

<sup>399</sup> Hewison (2002), 148.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-156.

<sup>402</sup> Prawase Wasi, *Ideas and Strategies for Equality between State, Power and Society, and for Wisdom* (Bangkok: Komolkeemthong, 1993) and Prawase Wasi, *Buddhist Agriculture and Peaceful Happiness for Thai Society* (Bangkok: Mo-chaoban, 1987), quoted in Nartsupha (2010), 159. (in Thai)

addition, communities should also establish alliances with other groups in civil society such as progressive middle class Thais.<sup>403</sup>

Criticising the globalised capitalist economy does not simply equate to being anti-globalisation, anti-industrialisation, anti-Western, or anti-progress. Localist discourses place a lot of emphasis on the development of sustainable agricultural production, community enterprises and self-help groups. However, this is understandable because they are basic economic activities based on natural resources that marginalised people can gain easier access to, as compare to industrial production which require more capital. As for the SAM, previous parts of the chapter have discussed how critiques of the market-led capitalist agri-food system and Western-dominated globalisation are used as foundations to envision better forms of globalisation embedded in values such as sustainability, fairness and partnership, to ensure that the majority of people benefit from globalisation in equitable manners. In addition, part 2 has discussed how promoters of sustainable agriculture do not object to industrial production, and encourage producers to move up along agri-food chains. The SAM also puts a lot of emphasis on building alliances with other groups in Thailand and abroad. Moreover, sustainable markets help to alter conventional market relations and provide alternatives, but they do not encourage farmers to be fully self-sufficient.<sup>404</sup>

When Thai localism is portrayed as being backward and anti-development, it sometimes seems to reflect the authors' adoption of modernist assumptions regarding the nature of development (which might also be equated with "progress") as having

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<sup>403</sup> Anan Ganjanapan, *Dynamics of Communities in Resource Management: Ideological Framework and Policies* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2000) and Anan Ganjanapan, *Economic Culture in an Economy of No Culture* (Bangkok: Kopfai, 2001), quoted in Nartsupha (2010), 159-160. (in Thai)

<sup>404</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 285.

to follow more or less a single one-directional path. In Hewison (2002), a quote from Prawase Wasi suggesting that self-reliance entails standing on one's own feet to achieve sustainable development from one's own initiatives, is somehow interpreted as a perspective which can be "anti-development".<sup>405</sup> In McCargo (2001), the study felt the need to mention that virtually all of the Thai intellectuals sympathetic to localism were Western-educated,<sup>406</sup> even though it is hardly relevant because one does not have to either reject or embrace (Western) globalisation, nor refrain from criticising the global economic status quo just because one was Western-educated. Another good example is Rigg, Promphaking and Le Mare (2014) which suggests that localist discourses and their focuses on villages and rural communities as places to return to, or as places of retirement and refuge, are obstacles for Thailand's economic progress and for Thais to reach their human potential.<sup>407</sup>

Thai localism's appeal to traditional wisdom and Buddhist values, as well as the King's support for self-reliance and sufficiency concepts, have also led critiques to conflate Thai localism with the King's concept of sufficiency, and to see such ideas and discourses as being fundamentally conservative, nationalist and royalist. For example, McCargo (2001) suggests that localism is a call to return to Thai agrarian roots, which is conservative and nostalgic, and also closely resemble the official Thai nationalism which is elitist and statist.<sup>408</sup> Another study by Hewison (2002) suggests that Thai localism resembles right-wing nationalist trinity in Thailand of Nation, Religion and King.<sup>409</sup> This, however, is arguably the opposite of

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<sup>405</sup> Hewison (2002), 149.

<sup>406</sup> Duncan McCargo, "Populism and Reformism in Contemporary Thailand," *South East Asia Research* 9, no. 1 (2001), 100.

<sup>407</sup> Rigg, Promphaking, Le Mare (2014), 186.

<sup>408</sup> From the Abstract of McCargo (2001).

<sup>409</sup> Hewison (2002), 157 and also Thongchai Winichakul, "Nationalism and the Radical Intelligentsia in Thailand," *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (April 2008): 575–591.



localist views. As discussed in Pasuk and Baker (1995), Thai localists are skeptical of the centralised Thai state and oppose conservative views which imagine rural Thailand as a society of contented peasants owing allegiance to the state epitomised by the trinity of Nation, Religion and King.<sup>410</sup> Another study, Rigg (1991), suggests that Thai NGOs want to build on traditional village structures with patron-client ties, not create new ones.<sup>411</sup> However, the thesis finds that localist discourses clearly emphasise the need to decentralise power and to build democratic horizontal social relations. Nartsupha, for example, was inspired by some strands of anarchist thoughts. He also explicitly states his concerns with Sakdina mentality and top-down co-optation by the state of Thai communities, and argues in favour of encouraging the spirits of freedom, international understanding, equality, generosity and democracy to undermine the power of the state and hierarchical culture.<sup>412</sup> His conception of communities does not infer hierarchical social structures nor violent intimidation within households or within communities.<sup>413</sup> Other scholars who share similar views with Nartsupha and support decentralisation of power include Seksan Prasertkul, who suggests that self-organised people's groups can be used to counter-balance the power of the state and market forces, and Anek Thammatas who suggests that self-organised community groups and their networks can help people to break free from patron-client relations and hierarchical social structure.<sup>414</sup> As previous parts have discussed, there are examples of sustainable producer groups

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<sup>410</sup> Phongpaichit and Baker (1995), 388.

<sup>411</sup> Jonathan Rigg, "Grass-Roots Development in Rural Thailand: A Lost Cause?," *World Development* 19, no. 2–3 (February 1991), 208.

<sup>412</sup> Nartsupha (2010), 170–172

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

<sup>414</sup> Seksan Prasertkul, *Citizen Politics in Thai Democracy* (Bangkok: Amarin, 2005); Anek Laothamatat, *Progressive Locality: Political Theories to Build the Local as a Foundation for Democracy* (Bangkok: Thai Health Organisation, 2009); Anek Laothamatat, *Changing Areas and Foundation: Building Local Administration and a Foundation for Democracy* (Bangkok: Thammasart University, 2009), quoted in Nartsupha (2010), 175–176. (in Thai)

which encourage partnership social relations within and between groups, rather than to support unequal vertical social relationships.

Some authors have gone further to interpret sufficiency ideas and discourse as determined efforts by conservative forces to repress the aspirations of poor Thais for political inclusion and material well-being, although Unger (2009) suggests little evidence to support such an interpretation.<sup>415</sup> While section 4.3 of this chapter discusses some conservative sufficiency programmes implemented by the bureaucracy and, as discussed in chapter 3, large amount of land holding by the Crown Property Bureau undermines counter-hegemonic images of the monarchy, these instances do not suggest that sufficiency *as ideas* should fundamentally be generalised as attempts to repress the aspirations of poor Thais, or that they are devoid of counter-hegemonic potential. Sustainable agricultural groups are sometimes portrayed as being co-opted by conservative forces, and indeed there are some sustainable agriculture groups which adopt rather royalist discourses, such as the Agri-Nature Foundation.<sup>416</sup> However, as part 1 has discussed, there are many sources of ideas not exclusively limited to Thailand that give rise to varieties of practices within the SAM, which have started before the popularisation of sufficiency ideas and the King's New Theory of Agriculture following the 1997 economic crisis. There are also different interpretations of sufficiency and self-reliance, which suggest that they are not completely monopolised by elite groups. Previous parts of the chapter have also discussed similarities of the Thai SAM with those in other countries, which suggest that it is more appropriate to view the SAM in Thailand as localised counter-hegemonic responses to structural problems in the

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<sup>415</sup> Unger (2009), 145.

<sup>416</sup> See information of the group at its website: <<http://www.agrinature.or.th/node/1>>.

global agri-food system. Understandably, vehement rejection (as well as uncritical embrace) of localism and sufficiency ideas often reflect evaluations of the King and perception of his role in Thai politics, at least as much as the content of the ideas.<sup>417</sup> To further complicate the situation, polarised political conflicts in Thailand in recent years also add fuel to conservative interpretations of Thai localism, sufficiency ideas, and sustainable agricultural practices, because of their association with the King of Thailand.

By pointing out that Thai localism and SAM should not be treated simply as the opposite end of development and progress, nor generalised as royalist conservative attempts to suppress the people's aspirations, the thesis does not mean to suggest that Thai localism and SAM are unproblematically counter-hegemonic, but that they deserve just and careful consideration. Insinuations that sustainable agriculture groups in Thailand are generally part of the conservative forces, ignoring structural political-economic causes which gave rise to these groups, serve to depoliticise and undermine the SAM which tries to challenge the hegemonic capitalist agri-food system, similar to critiques which try to portray sustainable farmers as "hippies" or merely as just another lifestyle choice.<sup>418</sup>

It is possible that such critiques of Thai localism partially stemmed from the writing styles of some Thai localists, which may seem romantic and unclear compare to Western academic writings. Nevertheless, as part 1 of this chapter has argued, localist ideas have relevance to some Thais who search for an alternative development paradigm, and there are those in the SAM who utilise similar ideas and concepts as localists. As discussed in chapter 2, a Gramscian perspective suggests

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<sup>417</sup> Unger (2009), 145.

<sup>418</sup> For example, see Kam Pakha (2014).

that social agents can draw on materials from their social and cultural contexts to build counter-hegemonic ideas. Such ideas can be fragmentary and contradictory, open to multiple interpretations and hence potentially supportive of emancipatory social visions and political projects.<sup>419</sup> For example, on the one hand, religions can be used as a key component in the construction of hegemony, but on the other hand, religions can also be used to advance counter-hegemonic project.<sup>420</sup> Brazil's Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) - an important member of La Vía Campesina - has made use of religious ideas as well as socialist, nationalist and communitarian ideas to build up their counter-hegemonic movement, which both practically and ideologically challenge the hegemonic status quo.<sup>421</sup> Therefore, similar to many social movements around the world, localist and sustainable agriculture ideas and practices in Thailand, which employ stereotypically conservative elements such as those relating to Buddhism, should be seen as national-popular strategies or as attempts to build locally situated counter-hegemony based on various sources of inspirations.

As part 1 has argued, SAM members use different types of terms and discourses to aid their counter-hegemonic project. To a certain extent, such varieties help to encourage different groups of people in Thai society to become interested in sustainable agriculture. For example, some people use localist and Buddhist terms, while some people prefer transnational counter-hegemonic terms such as food sovereignty (which appeal more to younger generations and middle class Thais).

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<sup>419</sup> Mark Rupert, *Ideologies of Globalization: Contending Visions of a New World Order* (London: Routledge, 2000), 11-12.

<sup>420</sup> Owen Worth, "Beyond World Order and Transnational Classes. The (Re)application of Gramsci in Global Politics," in *Gramsci and Global Politics. Hegemony and resistance*, ed. Mark McNally and John Schwarzmantel (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 29-30.

<sup>421</sup> Abdurazack Karriem, "The Rise and Transformation of the Brazilian Landless Movement into a Counter-hegemonic Political Actor: A Gramscian Analysis," *Geoforum* 40, no. 3 (May 2009), 323-324.

What they generally agree on, however, is the importance of developing a sustainable and fair agri-food system. Some promoters of sustainable agriculture have been seen as subscribers of the community culture school of thought, even though they suggest that it is their experience rather than social theory which led them to work on developing alternative agri-food production-consumption networks at local levels.<sup>422</sup>

While the thesis argues in favour of different varieties of counter-hegemonic discourses and practices, it recognises the importance of critical reflections and non-judgmental discussions to evaluate counter-hegemonic potential of these ideas and practices, to find room for improvement and to guard against co-optation of oppositions. Such discussions can also be enriched by different sources of counter-hegemonic ideas and practices, and by participations of different groups in society. A good example is how it has been pointed out that the term "local sage", which is used to construct a counter-hegemonic identity of sustainable Thai farmers, can partially be problematic because it tends to be associated with male farmers who have their own land.<sup>423</sup> In this case, a gender perspective is used to enrich the building of counter-hegemonic identity of farmers. Undeniably, conservative interpretations of counter-hegemonic ideas and practices relating to sustainable agriculture probably do exist, such as some state programmes to promote sufficiency discussed in section 4.3. In addition, as part 1 has discussed, localist ideas allow for challenges to the state and capitalism to include withdrawal into self-reliance at local levels,<sup>424</sup> which can potentially be problematic if macro-level hegemonic governance structures are left unchallenged. Indeed, there are those in the SAM who prefer to develop

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<sup>422</sup> Lienchamroon and Yaimuang (2011), 294.

<sup>423</sup> Bantuwong (2004), 268.

<sup>424</sup> Phongpaichit and Baker (1995), 388.

alternative production-distribution channels without trying to change national and global governance structures. As previously argued, developing alternative agri-food production-distribution channels is useful, but it is unlikely to lead to large-scale transformation of the current agri-food system by itself. Another issue to consider is whether some people in the SAM embrace sufficiency ideas because of their counter-hegemonic potential or because of their loyalty to the King. In the latter case, such loyalty can affect critical evaluations and hinder attempts to improve on sufficiency ideas and practices.

#### ***4.2) Grey areas and co-optation of oppositions by the private sector***

Concerns over transformative counter-hegemonic potential and co-optation of oppositions of alternative agri-food production-distribution channels, such as organic agriculture and fair trade, are well documented in existing literature, as discussed in part 4 of chapter 2. For example, some people welcome increased involvements of large agri-businesses in organic markets because it implies that organic products will be traded in larger scales, or suggest that large agri-businesses can co-exist with smaller-scale producers in organic markets.<sup>425</sup> However, there are those who argue that increased domination of large agri-businesses opens up opportunities for a hijacking of organic agriculture<sup>426</sup> as large agri-businesses have power to push out smaller competitors.<sup>427</sup> The following paragraphs discuss some examples from

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<sup>425</sup> Brad Coombes and Hugh Campbell, "Dependent Reproduction of Alternative Modes of Agriculture: Organic Farming in New Zealand," *Sociologia Ruralis* 38, no. 2 (1998): 127–145, quoted in Lyons et al. (2004), 116–118.

<sup>426</sup> For example: Daniel Buck, Christina Getz, and Julie Guthman, "From Farm to Table: The Organic Vegetable Commodity Chain of Northern California," *Sociologia Ruralis* 37, no. 1 (1997): 3–20.

<sup>427</sup> Kristen Lyons et al., "Contrasting Paths of Corporate Greening in Antipodean Agriculture: Organics and Green Production," in *Agribusiness and Society. Corporate Responses to Environmentalism, Market Opportunities and Public Regulation*, ed. Kees Jansen and Sietze Vellema (London: Zed Books, 2004), 120.

Thailand where the lines between hegemony and counter-hegemony are not so clear, which create opportunities for co-optation of oppositions by the private sector.

Reflecting the trends in other parts of the world, some corporations in Thailand have adopted counter-hegemonic terms such as sustainable agriculture and self-reliance, but dilute or re-define the meanings through discourses and production-distribution practices. Many large agri-businesses in Thailand have entered the organic market even though they are still major players which sell chemical inputs and engage in hegemonic agri-food production and distribution. Large agri-businesses sometimes label their activities using counter-hegemonic terms even though their activities do not reflect counter-hegemonic intent. An example is how the Charoen Pokapand group (CP) has many corporate social responsibility programmes which involve agricultural projects that claim to be inspired by King Bhumipol's integrated farms and sufficiency ideas.<sup>428</sup> While these projects are very minor parts of CP's transnational agri-business operations, they help CP to portray itself, with help of counter-hegemonic terms, as being responsive to environmental and social concerns. Aside from its 24 hours new channel (TNN24), CP also benefits from stories of pro-CP farmers advertised in many large media channels.<sup>429</sup> Such actions confuse the meaning of counter-hegemonic ideas such as self-reliance and sustainable agriculture, and hence undermine counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand. The CP group has also tried to engage in organic farming in the Northeast of Thailand.<sup>430</sup> Other large agri-businesses have also started organic contract farming programmes, where farmers ought to purchase seeds and organic fertilisers from the companies in exchange for production loans. In many of these

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<sup>428</sup> CorpWatch-Thailand, "Connections Between CP, Politicians and Thai Bureaucracy," in *CP and Thai Agriculture* (Nonthaburi: BioThai, 2008), 38. (in Thai)

<sup>429</sup> Mr. Paisit Panichkul, Law lecturer at Chiang Mai University, interviewed 7 November 2012.

<sup>430</sup> Unno (2005), 223 and 225.

cases, it has been argued that farmers lack the freedom and power to negotiate terms, and organic farming in this manner is arguably just another profit-making tactic.<sup>431</sup>

Some large-scale distributors and retailers of sustainable agri-food products engage in both conventional and alternative agri-food markets. By 2007, Capital Rice (Nakhon Luang) - a major exporter of conventional rice - has also become one of the largest organic rice exporter, alongside Green Net Co-operative.<sup>432</sup> In some cases, counter-hegemonic potential is clearly limited, such as when physical appearance standards are strictly enforced, which have adverse effects on farmers. Moreover, the unchallenged dominant position of supermarkets as agri-food sellers give them some degree of monopoly power, which make their entries into the organic market problematic. Many supermarkets allow a few organic items on their shelves even though they have no further interest to promote sustainable agriculture, and they also mark up the prices more significantly relative to the prices that they paid producers.<sup>433</sup> Naso group had supplied their rice to a supermarket in the past, but found that the supermarket charged a lot of fees so it was not profitable to continue supplying to the supermarket.<sup>434</sup>

To a certain extent, developing clear counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices, as well as supportive governance structures can help to ameliorate problems of co-optation of oppositions. This is a difficult task even in supposedly counter-hegemonic organic and fair trade markets, where there also seem to be grey areas between hegemony and counter-hegemony. As part 2 has discussed, there are those in the SAM who criticise large scale exports of mono-crops through

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<sup>431</sup> Witoon Lienchamroon, "Alternative Agriculture," (2011), 177-178.

<sup>432</sup> Panyakul and Sakjirattikarn (2003), 134.

<sup>433</sup> Nikhom Pechpa, Thamma-ruamjai moral rice network, interviewed 23 December 2013, Yasothon.

<sup>434</sup> Chutima Muangman, Manager of Naso rice mill, interviewed 25 December 2012.



organic and fair trade channels, because such an approach retains some similar ideas and practices as that in the hegemonic agri-food system. Some academic studies have voiced similar concerns. For example, it has been argued that organic agriculture regulations should understand organic agriculture as production and distribution processes which encompass social and ecological dimensions, rather than mere usage of organic inputs or "cookie-cutter" organic practices, which allow large corporations to engage in large scale mono-crop plantations of organic agri-food products.<sup>435</sup>

Private sustainability and fairness standards can also be seen as potentially problematic governance structures. Understandably, to sell to distant markets, it is necessary to pass sustainability standards such as organic and fair trade which are accepted in those countries.<sup>436</sup> However, the certification process can be complicated and prices can be high, which implies a bias in favour of large scale farms because small-scale farmers are likely to require external help, such as from export or distribution companies. For example, Bak-rua community rice mill pays around 300,000 baht certification fee for 100 of their members which means that even though organic producers have low costs of production, the mill has rather high management costs.<sup>437</sup> As part 2 has discussed, even if farmers managed to receive certifications, there is no guarantee that their products can be sold in international markets. There are a lot of competition from producers in other developing

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<sup>435</sup> For example: Peter M. Rosset and Miguel A. Altieri, "Agroecology Versus Input Substitution: A Fundamental Contradiction of Sustainable Agriculture," *Society and Natural Resources* 10, no. 3 (1997): 283–95; Julie Guthman, "Regulating Meaning, Appropriating Nature: The Codification of California Organic Agriculture," *Antipode* 30, no. 2 (1998): 135–154.

<sup>436</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 172.

<sup>437</sup> Somwang Chomchuen, Bak-rua rice mill, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

countries<sup>438</sup> who have advantages over Thai producers due to cheaper labour costs and historical colonial ties with European countries.<sup>439</sup>

Other problems facing sustainable farmer groups which were discussed in part 2 include: 1) difficulties in establishing long term consumer-producer relations and to explain local problems to distant buyers; 2) profits received from the sales of one or two items are still insufficient to raise living standards of producers and of farmer groups, and; 3) unavailability of appropriate production technology for small-scale enterprises. These problems call into question the counter-hegemonic extent of organic and fair trade production-distribution practices. There are studies which also voice similar concerns, suggesting that private sustainability and fair trade standards require high level of investments that favour large-scale producers<sup>440</sup> and can act as non-tariff trade barriers.<sup>441</sup> In addition, there is also a question of participation and democratic legitimacy in setting such private standards.<sup>442</sup> On the other hand, local and national market channels such as green markets and CSA also have limited counter-hegemonic potential as they are constrained by smaller market size, smaller transaction volumes and limited geographical coverage. The next section discusses the Thai state's sustainability certification and how different certifications can confuse consumers and open up room for co-optation of oppositions.

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<sup>438</sup> Many interviewees in the AAN pointed out this issue, such as Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, 3 October 2012, Nonthaburi and Chomchuan Boonrahong, 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>439</sup> An observation by Sompoi Jansang, Manager of the Rice Fund Surin mill, 19 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>440</sup> For example, see: Laura DeLind and Philip Howard, "Safe at Any Scale? Food Scares, Food Regulation, and Scaled Alternatives," *Agriculture and Human Values* 25, no. 3 (2008): 301–317; Yuichiro Amekawa, "Reflections on the Growing Influence of Good Agricultural Practices in the Global South," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 22, no. 6 (2009): 531–557, quoted in Schreinemachers et al. (2012), 520.

<sup>441</sup> For example, see: C. Chen, J. Yang, and C. Findlay, "Measuring the Effect of Food Safety Standards on China's Agricultural Exports," *Review of World Economics* 144, no. 1 (2008): 83–106, quoted in Schreinemachers et al. (2012), 520.

<sup>442</sup> For example, see: Lawrence Busch, "The Private Governance of Food: Equitable Exchange or Bizarre Bazaar?," *Agriculture and Human Values* 36, no. 3 (2009): 1–8, quoted in Schreinemachers et al. (2012), 520.

#### ***4.3) Grey areas and co-optation of oppositions by the Thai state***

As part 3 has discussed, the Thai state makes some attempts to promote sustainable agriculture. However, it has been noted that the bureaucracy tends to promote diluted versions of alternative agriculture with only mild changes in the production system.<sup>443</sup> For example, in some publications, the definition of alternative agriculture still allows for the use of some chemical inputs,<sup>444</sup> and there is no emphasis on helping farmers to reduce the costs of production nor to use resource as efficiently as possible.<sup>445</sup> In addition, some have observed that the bureaucracy tends to promote growing different crops in a farm, but is not concerned with how each crop aids one another in an ecological manner, which is not very different from promoting a few mono-crops in one farm.<sup>446</sup>

Since the Thai state's publications often conflate sustainable agriculture with the King's sufficiency economy philosophy,<sup>447</sup> one might expect the bureaucracy's interests and acceptance of the King's sufficiency concept to be a positive motivating factor. However, it has been argued that the bureaucracy's mechanical promotion of sufficiency economy and sustainable agriculture has become a tool of bureaucratic ideological control,<sup>448</sup> where the bureaucracy uses sufficiency programmes to impose some moral values on the locals, uses the people's fear of authority to force

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<sup>443</sup> Anusorn Unno, "Alternative Agriculture: Indigenous Knowledge Advances and Counter-Attack," in *Knowledge and politics of natural resources. Academic series number 43*, ed. Darin Inmuan (Bangkok: Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, 2005), 228. (in Thai)

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-249.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>446</sup> Thanwa Jitsanguan and et al., *Report on the guideline and policy to develop sustainable agriculture: a case study of the Northeastern area*, 86, quoted from Unno (2005), 229.

<sup>447</sup> For example, "National Strategic Plan to Develop Organic Agriculture 2 2013-2016 Draft, Received from Ms. Wibulwan Wannamolee, Senior Specialist on Agri-Food Standards, National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards Office, 31 January 2013," 1 and 11.

<sup>448</sup> Phruk Thaotawil, "Self-Sufficiency Project at the Village Level: Elitist Control over the Rural Sector," *Fah-Diewkan Academic Magazine* 6, no. 2 (2008), 71 and 73. (in Thai)

them to co-operate, or uses the King's name to legitimise their projects.<sup>449</sup> Often, standardised sustainable agriculture or sufficiency programmes are implemented on every region without taking into account local differences nor involve local farmers in the decision making process,<sup>450</sup> which suggest a markedly different understanding of sustainable agriculture and sufficiency as discussed in the previous parts of this chapter. These can be seen as examples of co-optation of oppositions, where the bureaucracy subsumes potentially counter-hegemonic ideas into Sakdina patron-client top-down mentality through implementations of their development projects. Farmers' difficulties in making transitions toward sustainable agriculture, after they received training from the bureaucracy, have also been interpreted as individual failings on farmers' part.<sup>451</sup>

There are some interests in the Ministry of Commerce to promote organic agriculture but this is mainly because the Ministry sees opportunities to export organic products to serve growing niche markets in advanced capitalist countries,<sup>452</sup> not because the Ministry is motivated to transform the agri-food system in Thailand as a whole. As a national policy, the Thai state also seems more interested in food safety and good agricultural practice (GAP) standard which allow the use of some pesticides, rather than sustainable agriculture.<sup>453</sup> In 2004, the Thai government declared a year of food safety and introduced a public standard for GAP called Q-GAP, which is fully managed by the government. By 2010, Q-GAP certificates were

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<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. Similar points are also made by Decha Siripat, 14 October 2012, as well as by Adisorn Puangchompoo and Kittithanet Rangkaworaset, 1 rai-100,000 baht project, interviewed 13 January 2013.

<sup>451</sup> Mr. Somchai Wisartpong, Organic Agriculture and Development Group, Department of Agricultural Extension, phone interview on 21 January 2013.

<sup>452</sup> Mr. Sittipon Bangkaew, Director of the Office of Commercial Affairs in Surin, interviewed 21 December 2012.

<sup>453</sup> Ms. Wibulwan Wannamolee, senior officer at the Office of Agricultural Standards and Accreditation, interviewed 31 January 2013, Nonthaburi.

issued to around 212,000 farmers, covering 3.7 percent of the country's farm households and 1.2 percent of the country's arable and permanent cropland.<sup>454</sup> Q-GAP, however, becomes one of many competing alternative state and private agri-food labels with different sustainability criteria that serve to confuse consumers. A survey of 848 respondents in Bangkok in 2005, for example, suggests that consumers who purchase organic vegetables cannot clearly differentiate between various pesticide-safe labels and organic labels, and are unsure of the differences in production methods.<sup>455</sup> Some have also argued that Q-GAP and other safe food labels increase market competitions, which hinder development of organic agriculture and other forms of agro-ecological production organic products.<sup>456</sup> In addition, Q-GAP may not lead to safer food or more sustainable agricultural practices. A study in Northern Thailand, for example, suggests that Q-GAP fruit and vegetable producers did not use fewer nor less hazardous pesticides due to many reasons, such as poor implementation of farm auditing and too rapid Q-GAP programme expansion.<sup>457</sup>

As the previous chapter discussed, agri-food related populist policies, such as the paddy pledging scheme, can also be seen as a form of co-optation of oppositions. This is because the scheme claims to help solve rice farmers' economic problems and portrays the government as being on the side of small-scale producers, even though the scheme actually intensifies problems of the hegemonic agri-food system. Interviews of producer rice mill managers in Yasothon and Surin also suggest that

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<sup>454</sup> Pepijn Schreinemachers et al., "Can Public GAP Standards Reduce Agricultural Pesticide Use? The Case of Fruit and Vegetable Farming in Northern Thailand," *Agriculture and Human Values* 29 (2012), 521-522.

<sup>455</sup> Birgit Roitner-Schobesberger et al., "Consumer Perceptions of Organic Foods in Bangkok, Thailand," *Food Policy* 33 (2008), Abstract, 114 and 115.

<sup>456</sup> Panyakul and Sakjirattikarn (2003), 136.

<sup>457</sup> Schreinemachers et al (2012), 519, 523-526.

the paddy pledging scheme hinders organic rice production and undermines small-scale rice enterprises.<sup>458</sup> The scheme significantly raised the purchase price for paddy, which reduced the difference between prices of organic and ordinary paddy. In 2011, the price of Jasmine paddy under the scheme was higher than organic Jasmine paddy price (20 baht per kg. compare to 17 to 18 baht per kg.).<sup>459</sup> The producer rice mills in Yasothon and Surin had to increase their purchase price for organic paddy to be able to fulfil their export orders. If they did not raise their purchase price, some of their farmer members might chose to sell elsewhere or even switch back to intensive conventional production.<sup>460</sup> In the case of Bak-rua rice mill in 2011, only around 130 members out of the usual figure of 200 sold their paddy to the rice mill.<sup>461</sup> With lower volumes of paddy to process, the rice mills lose more profits due to sunk costs.<sup>462</sup> Raising paddy purchase price, however, was problematic because of cash flow problems and because the rice mills could not receive higher export prices from buyers who tended not to understand the domestic situation in Thailand,<sup>463</sup> and are also searching for suppliers in other countries.<sup>464</sup>

This section has discussed lingering hegemonic influence in the state's promotion of sustainable agriculture. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the Thai state should not simply be seen as a monolithic hegemonic entity, and that within the state apparatus there is also tension between hegemonic and counter-

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<sup>458</sup> For example, Boonsong Martkhao, Kammad group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>459</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 237.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid*, 237; Sompoi Jansang, Rice Fund Surin mill, interviewed 19 December 2012; Thamma Sangkalee, Ta-toom Natural Farmer group, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>461</sup> Somwang Chomchuen, Bak-rua rice mill, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>462</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 124.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid*, 122-123, Suwonasart Konbua, Green Net Co-operative, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon and also Chutima Muangman, Naso rice mill, interviewed 25 December 2012, who suggests she tried to explain the situation to German Fair trade buyers but was not sure they understood.

<sup>464</sup> Sompoi Jansang, Rice Fund Surin mill, interviewed 19 December 2012; Sittiporn Bangkaew, Director of the Office of Commercial Affairs in Surin, interviewed 21 December 2012; Kamnueng Maneebool, Nam-oom Enterprise, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

hegemonic forces, similar to some large corporations which engage in both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices. As previously discussed, there are some state managers and offices which seem genuinely supportive of SAM. The support, however, also depends on policy direction at the top-levels and can be inconsistent. Moreover, even though some state officials embrace counter-hegemonic agri-food ideas to certain extents, their positions in the Thai state's apparatus force them to find compromises. This is because they have to follow policy directions of the ruling political parties, such as with regards to the paddy pledging scheme,<sup>465</sup> or because many people in their local districts (and many Thais in general) still believe that agricultural chemicals are necessary as organic agriculture cannot produce enough food to ensure Thai and global food security.<sup>466</sup>

## Conclusion

As hegemonic forces try to adapt and subsume dissenting forces which challenge the status quo, they might allow some changes in the agri-food system which serve to appease and obstruct the transformation of the agri-food system as a whole. This suggests that counter-hegemonic forces need to continuously develop clear ideas, practices and governance structures to guard against co-optation, and that counter-hegemony should be seen as a process over a long period of time rather than a one-off chance at transformative change that can be judge as either success or fail. It is unrealistic to assume or to expect that counter-hegemonic movements should embody purely counter-hegemonic elements, because counter-hegemony is still an

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<sup>465</sup> Sittipon Bangkaew, Director of the Office of Commercial Affairs in Surin, interviewed 21 December 2012.

<sup>466</sup> Mr. Thaspong Tonklang and Mr. Thanachote Jaikla, Director and Vice Director of the local administration office in Tambol Tamor, Surin, interviewed 20 December 2012. Also the views of, for example, Mr. Songpun Kuldilokrat, Managing Director at Arysta LifeScience Co., Ltd, email correspondent 21 January 2013; Dr. Kriengsak Suwantharadol, Syngenta (Thailand), email correspondent 14 March 2013.

ongoing process, not to mention that movements often have to compromise as short to medium term strategies so that they can survive in the dominantly hegemonic agri-food system. Some existing literature, however, do not address the heterogeneity and evolving nature of counter-hegemonic agri-food practices, nor try to understand structural problems in the agri-food system. For example, a case study of organic agriculture in Ubolratchathani province in 2011 is useful in pointing out some current problems with organic agriculture in Thailand, but goes too far in arguing that organic agriculture in Thailand as a whole has developed under the control of the Thai state and capital.<sup>467</sup>

Discussions of the SAM in this chapter help the thesis to advance six original contributions to knowledge which were outlined in chapter 1. Through an empirical exploration of the SAM in Thailand, this chapter brings new empirical information into existing literature on alternative agri-food movements, which is the second contribution to knowledge of the thesis. The discussion on co-optation of oppositions also helps to advance the first original contribution, which is to bring new empirical information from the Thai case study into existing literature on the corporate agri-food system. Arguably, co-optation attempts can be seen as an essential element in the dynamics of the hegemonic agri-food system, which adapts to subsume dissent and to maintain the status quo.

This chapter also helps to advance the third and fourth contributions to knowledge; to extend neo-Marxist and Gramscian theories on the agri-food system in Thailand, as well as to provide new perspectives and data on Thai agrarian development and social movements. The neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical

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<sup>467</sup> Natedao Thaotawil, “‘Barely Sufficient’: A Question Regarding Self-Reliance of Organic Farmers in the Age of Globalisation and Development,” *Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 30, no. 2 (2011), 84-85. (in Thai)



perspective adopted in this thesis is used as a conceptual frame to explore the SAM in Thailand, which allows the chapter to provide new perspectives on the SAM. Discussions on counter-hegemonic ideas, practices and governance structures of the SAM suggest their interconnections and point out some possible counter-hegemonic limitations of the SAM. On the other hand, engagement with empirical data suggests that some theoretical concepts cannot be as neatly defined in reality as in theory. As part 4 has discussed, the lines between hegemony, counter-hegemony and co-optation of oppositions are not always clear. In addition, section 4.1 of this chapter helps to advance the fifth contribution to knowledge by providing new perspectives on Thai localism. In sum, the section argues that Thai localism can be seen as a counter-hegemonic national-popular strategy rather than an attempt to cling to the past, even though it retains some problematic elements. This chapter's brief discussion of how some people are skeptical of sustainable agriculture groups, because of their associations with the King's sufficiency ideas and the monarchy's (perceived) role in the polarised political conflict, also helps to advance the sixth contribution to knowledge which is to provide new perspectives on polarised politics in Thailand.

The next chapter will discuss the land reform movement in Thailand to give a fuller picture of counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand. Members of the land reform movement tend to be marginalised farmers and workers, whereas sustainable farmers discussed in this chapter tend to have their own land.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Land Reform Movement in Thailand**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter has discussed the sustainable agriculture movement in Thailand. This chapter focuses on the case study of the contemporary land reform movement (LRM) in Thailand, where members tend to consist of relatively more marginalised farmers and labourers without or with insufficient land. Aside from discussions on counter-hegemonic ideas and practices of the LRM, this chapter also explores how land issues are related to the development of sustainable agriculture in Thailand. In addition, this chapter provides a foundation to discuss future areas of research in the last chapter of the thesis, especially regarding the interconnections of natural resource management issues.

Similar to the previous chapter, this chapter helps to support the second and third main arguments of the thesis; that although the mainstream agri-food system is dominated by hegemonic capitalist interests, domestic and transnational counter-hegemonic forces can influence some changes in the system even though they are faced with limitations and co-optation of oppositions. This chapter argues that the LRM tries to develop complementary counter-hegemonic ideas, governance structures, as well as production-distribution practices, to promote a more equitable distribution of land from social justice and food security perspectives. Overall the LRM can be seen as part of global counter-hegemonic forces consisting of transnational as well as many local and national movements, which similarly try to de-commodify and promote equitable distribution of land. This chapter also supports

the fourth main argument of the thesis and suggests that even though the LRM faces some difficulties, its hegemonic project should be seen as an on-going process that evolves over time under specific political-economic conditions, and that lingering hegemonic elements should be addressed rather than sentenced as failures.

Empirical information in this chapter is based on secondary sources in English and Thai, as well as interviews of 27 people who are involved in the LRM such as land occupiers, activists, and academics. Additional interviews of people outside of the LRM are also used, such as interviews of civil servants. In this chapter, the LRM is conceptualised as broad and unstructured networks consisting of different groups and individuals from all regions of Thailand who are united by similar ideas and goals. Notable groups include the Northern Peasants Federation, Esaan Land Reform Network, Southern Peasants Federation, and Bantad Mountain Land Reform Network. As discussed in chapter 1, interviews and site visits for this chapter were based in three main provinces in two regions of Thailand, including Bangkok and metropolitan area (such as Nonthaburi and Nakhonpratom) in the Central region, as well as Chiang Mai and Lamphun in the Northern region. The focus of site visits was on community land title deed (CLTD) projects in the North where CLTD ideas and practice originated from, as well as Klongyong CLTD project in Nakhonpratom. Interviews of LRM members from other regions, such as the South, were conducted during the protest in front of Government House in Bangkok in October 2012. This chapter also discusses the Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO) and its role in distributing land to small-scale farmers.

The first part of this chapter discusses counter-hegemonic ideas of the LRM to provide a background to understand counter-hegemonic governance structures and

production-distribution practices. The LRM's main focus is on the governance of land so unlike the previous chapter, counter-hegemonic governance structures are discussed first in part 2, while counter-hegemonic production-distribution practices are discussed in part 3. Part 4 then discusses some important obstacles facing the movement such as violence, legal suits, as well as possibility of co-optation of oppositions. Contact information of CLTD projects discussed in this chapter can be found in Appendix 2.

### **Part 1: Counter-hegemonic ideas and discourses**

This part of the chapter provides an overview of the LRM's counter-hegemonic ideas. First, section 1.1 discusses the LRM's critique of hegemonic land governance structures which give primacy to private individual rights and encourage the commodification of land. This section also reviews academic literature on hegemonic land governance. Section 1.2 then discusses counter-hegemonic ideas of the LRM, particularly ideas regarding the complexity of rights, that inspire community land title deed (CLTD) practices.

#### ***1.1) The LRM's critique of hegemonic land governance***

Between 1982 and 1986, the Thai state started to implement a formal titling programme in the country with encouragements from the World Bank and other international institutions which gave loans to Thailand.<sup>1</sup> Formal titling increased land values throughout the country.<sup>2</sup> There were also more land transactions and increased borrowing against land from formal financial institutions, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Sayamon Kraiyoowong et al., *A Study of Land Conflicts in Thailand Phase 1* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2005), 43. (in Thai)

<sup>2</sup> Achara Rakyutitham et al., *Land and Freedom* (Bangkok: Black Lead Publishing, 2005), 40. (in Thai)

increased fiscal revenues from land, which all led to the Thai formal titling programme's receipt of the World Bank Award for Excellence in 1997.<sup>3</sup> The World Bank also promoted similar market-led agrarian reform schemes in other countries in the 1990s, such as in Brazil, South Africa and the Philippines.<sup>4</sup>

Some academics and members of the LRM point out that formal land titling resulted in increased land speculation. Some people used land as collateral to take out loans from commercial banks to purchase more land,<sup>5</sup> which were then often left under-utilised.<sup>6</sup> After the Asian economic crisis of 1997, fallen land prices led to a lot of non-performing loans. Many land plots were confiscated by banks and left unused.<sup>7</sup> Similar to the situations in many other countries, dispossessions of relatively poorer parts of the population, such as farmers, become notable effects in Thailand because land sales favour those who have access to capital and greater ability to purchase land.<sup>8</sup> Some academic studies and members of the LRM also point to widespread corruption in the issuing of formal titling documents,<sup>9</sup> as well as in the rental and usage of state-owned land. In Suratthani province, Thai and foreign companies continued to use 60,043 rai of reserved forest land even though their

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<sup>3</sup> Derek Hall, Philip Hirsch, and Tania Murray Li, *Powers of Exclusion: Land Dilemmas in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011), 37-38.

<sup>4</sup> Haroon Akram-Lodhi, "Land, Markets and Neoliberal Enclosure: An Agrarian Political Economy Perspective," *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 8 (December 2007), 1437-1438; Olivier De Schutter, "How Not to Think of Land-Grabbing: Three Critiques of Large-Scale Investments in Farmland," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 2 (March 2011), 269.

<sup>5</sup> Rakyutitham et al. (2005), 40; Methee Singsootham, *Practical Action Research Report on Sustainable Land Reform and Management by the People* (Nonthaburi: Land Reform Network and Local Act, 2010), 12. (in Thai)

<sup>6</sup> Singsootham (2010), 40.

<sup>7</sup> Kraiyoorawong et al. (2005), 43; Singsootham (2010), 14. A study also suggests that land speculation bubbles contributed to the 1997 economic crisis. (Warin Wongharnchao and Land Institute Foundation, *A Study of Ownership and Usage of Land, as Well as Economic and Legal Measures to Maximise Land Usage* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2001). (In Thai))

<sup>8</sup> Singsootham (2010), 39; Kraiyoorawong et al. (2005), 43; Walden Bello, Shea Cunningham, and Li Kheng Pho, *A Siamese Tragedy. Development and Disintegration in Modern Thailand* (New York: Zed Books, 1998), 161; De Schutter (2011), 270. For an account of dispossession and landlessness problems and conflicts up to the 1970s - 1980s, see Bello, Cunningham and Li (1998), 138-152.

<sup>9</sup> Singsootham (2010), 13 and 71; Hall, Hirsch and Li (2011), 38; Kraiyoorawong et al. (2005), 88.

license had already expired, and 68,500 rai of palm oil plantations also continued their operations even though their licenses had expired.<sup>10</sup> The capturing of the titling process by elites is, however, not specifically unique to the Thai context.<sup>11</sup>

LRM members often use the term "commodification of land" (การทำให้ที่ดินเป็นสินค้า) to describe the consequences of market-led governance of land,<sup>12</sup> or sometimes as the work of Neo-liberalism.<sup>13</sup> Commodification of land is also criticised as being responsible for over-usage of land which has negative effects on the ecological system. One frequently cited example is eucalyptus plantations which lead to land and water degradation in nearby areas.<sup>14</sup> Even though they did not use academic terms, some LRM members interviewed express feelings of alienation from the legal system and from state land policies,<sup>15</sup> criticise the centralisation of political power in Bangkok,<sup>16</sup> as well as linkages between large capital and the Thai state which stop land reform issues from being taken seriously.<sup>17</sup> One LRM member describes how the legal system is skewed in favour of capital and that this is part of the ongoing "natural resource war".<sup>18</sup> Although the Constitution (1997 as well as 2007) accepts principles of community rights in resource management, legally there can only be

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<sup>10</sup> The Land Reform Network and Local Act, *A Report on the Study "Land Management and Social Justice: A Case Study of the Land Reform Network", Part of the Project to Encourage Social Justice, Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 2010), 107. (in Thai).

<sup>11</sup> For example, see De Schutter (2011), 269.

<sup>12</sup> Mr. Direk Kong-ngern, farmer leader from Baan Pong, Chiang Mai and Mr. Wacharin Ouprajong, farmer leader from Baan Huafai, Ampur Chaiprakarn, Chiang Mai, interviewed Nonthaburi, 30 September 2012; Singsootham (2010), 12.

<sup>13</sup> Singsootham (2010), 12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Mrs. Wilaiwan Konka, Vice-president of Baan Pae-tai, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>16</sup> Mr. Long Pechsood, LRM member from Bantad Mountain group, Ampur Palian, Trang, interviewed during the demonstration in front of Government House, 1 October 2012, Bangkok.

<sup>17</sup> Mr. Direk Kong-ngern, LRM member from Baan Pong, Chiang Mai, interviewed 30 September 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>18</sup> Mr. Sawai Malai, LRM member from Yasothon province, quoted during the discussion panel on land problems at the second National Reform Assembly, 2012, Bangkok, Thailand.

either state or private land<sup>19</sup> similar to many other countries. In addition, forestry laws encourage the Forestry Ministry's vertical and monopoly control over many sites of land whose ownerships are being contested.<sup>20</sup> These issues are discussed in greater detail in section 2.2.

To be fair, the Thai state has made some (allegedly weak) attempts to re-distribute land and to promote equitable ownership of land. Owing to pressures from social movements in the 1970s which called for land reform, the Thai state passed the Land Reform Act and established the Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO) in 1975.<sup>21</sup> The Land Reform Act stipulated a maximum holding of 50 rai of land with surplus land liable to expropriation and distribution to peasants after compensation at market value.<sup>22</sup> In practice, however, the law is generally not enforced on the landlords.<sup>23</sup> As for ALRO, most land that it managed to re-distribute to small-scale farmers were state owned or deforested public land. Only 383,760 rai of farmland had been purchased from private landowners by 1993.<sup>24</sup> By 2012, ALRO claimed to re-distribute 34 million rai of land to 2.26 million farmers in 70 provinces.<sup>25</sup> However, data in 2010 suggests that only 29 percent of farmers own land.<sup>26</sup> ALRO is also haunted by the Sor Por Kor 4-01 scandal during the Chaun Leekpai administration which came into power in 1993, where some ALRO land

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<sup>19</sup> A Parliamentary Committee to Consider Land Problems, *A Report on How to Solve the Problems Regarding Land Use, Land Laws, and the Rushed Property Rights Document Process* (Bangkok: A Parliamentary Committee to Consider Land Problems, 2009), 17. (in Thai)

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 67.

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Weerachai Narkwibulwong, Secretary General of ALRO, interviewed 14 February 2013, Bangkok, and Singsootham (2010), 10-11.

<sup>22</sup> Bello, Cunningham and Li (1998), 149.

<sup>23</sup> Singsootham (2010), 10-11.

<sup>24</sup> Bello, Cunningham, and Li (1998), 152.

<sup>25</sup> Weerachai Narkwibulwong, "37 Years of Land Reform and the Adaptation of Sufficiency Economy," in *37 Years of the Agricultural Land Reform Office* (Bangkok: ALRO, 2012), 15. (in Thai)

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Duangmanee Laowakul, Faculty of Economics, Thammasart University, research presentation at the Food Security Assembly 2014 in Thailand, quoted in "Macro View of Land in Thailand Reveals Inequality and Highly Concentrated Land: Wealth in Poor People's Tears," *Isra News*, July 14, 2014. (in Thai)

were accused of being given to rich and influential allies of the government in the South.<sup>27</sup> A few studies also suggest that re-distributed state land given to small-scale farmers have changed hands despite prohibitive laws.<sup>28</sup> As the next section discusses in greater detail, the LRM also suggests that individual titling deeds open room for dispossessions of small-scale farmers through market forces. Moreover, exchanges of ideas with transnational social movements, such as La Vía Campesina , also increase LRM members' awareness of the new wave of global land grabs which arises from food-energy scarcity concerns.

### *1.2) Counter-hegemonic ideas regarding land governance*

The LRM has developed its counter-hegemonic ideas and practices over time by learning from experience and through discussions between local farmers, NGOs and academics. Many people in the contemporary LRM in the North were inspired by the leftist Peasants Federation of Thailand (PFT)<sup>29</sup> which mobilised to pressure for land reform in the 1970s but was brutally suppressed by the military and right-wing groups in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>30</sup> Discussions among Northern farmer networks, which led to the establishment of the Northern Peasants Federation on 22 October 1999, concluded that many problems facing farmers such as those relating to land, water, forest, agricultural prices and debt, are similar to the problems back in 1972.<sup>31</sup> Members of the LRM also suggest that one failure of the ALRO is that it distributes land in the form of individual title deeds, which allows these land to be

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<sup>27</sup> For more information on the scandal, see Bello, Cunningham, and Li (1998), 155-158.

<sup>28</sup> A Parliamentary Committee to Consider Land Problems (2009), 18.

<sup>29</sup> Mr. Wacharin Ouprajong, Baan Huafai, Ampur Chaiprakarn, Chiang Mai, interviewed 30 September 2012, Nonthaburi; Mr. Rangsan Sansongkwae, Baan Raidong, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun; Mr. Somkiat Jai-ngarm, Northern Peasants Federation activist, interviewed 30 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>30</sup> Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, 1995, *Thailand: Economy and Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 307-308.

<sup>31</sup> Mr. Prayong Doklamyai, advisor to the Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.



sold off to non-farmers and enables relatively easy appropriation by businessmen and landlords who have higher economic power.<sup>32</sup> As a potential solution to this problem, many people in the LRM are drawn to community rights ideas which, as discussed in previous chapters, are seen by many NGOs and activists in Thailand as inspirations to find alternatives to the capitalist system. In addition, Anan Ganjanapan's work on the "complexity of rights" (สิทธิเชิงซ้อน) are often referred to by the LRM.

Some scholars warn against romanticising community-based governance of natural resources where community is conceptualised as territorially fixed, small, and homogenous entity.<sup>33</sup> Ganjanapan's and the LRM's ideas, however, are not as simplistic as that. Ganjanapan's major contribution to community school of thought's literature in Thailand is to point out that communities should not be seen as static ideal or essentialised units which remain unchanged over time, nor as isolated units with no relations to wider society, the state, or market. Instead, it is important to see communities as changeable and re-creatable, as well as to recognise power ideologies and social relations in the constructions of communities which can be harmonious or conflict-prone. A community's boundaries are not limited by geographical space, but by multiple sets of boundaries such as at household and village levels, as well as by wider networks that may not occupy the same

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<sup>32</sup> Many leading members and general members of the LRM have made these points such as Prapart Pintoang, lecturer of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, interviewed 16 October 2012, Nonthaburi; Prayong Doklamyai, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai; Sangwal Kantham, LRM local leader from Ban Mae-aow, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun; Nop Mangkornmai, Raidong member in the Raidong/Mae-aow CLTD project, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>33</sup> Arun Agrawal and Clark C. Gibson, "Enchantment and Disenchantment: The Role of Community in Natural Resource Conservation," *World Development* 27, no. 4 (April 1999), 636.

geographical space.<sup>34</sup> As social situations continue to change, such as through dialogues and disagreements involving different groups of people in the society, a community's values and rules can be adjusted to suit changing situations. In other words, "community" can be seen as a unit, as well as an identity, which is constantly being re-created or reproduced through community members' engagement with wider society.<sup>35</sup>

Community rights discourse can also be seen as a reaction to existing "mono-right" mentality and legal system which violate the "complexity of rights" practices in some rural societies.<sup>36</sup> Complexity of rights refer to multiple management principles where different forms of rights can overlap within a geographical unit. It also implies a sense of generosity and self-help in the community to help secure everyone's ability to meet basic needs.<sup>37</sup> For example, one may have an ownership right over a piece of land but others may benefit from by-products of the land. Leading supporters of CLTD tend to see complexity of rights and community rights as innovations that challenge the capitalist way of thinking.<sup>38</sup> Complexity of rights ideas and writings of other academics such as Chalartchai Ramitanont have also been used to develop community forests ideas and practices in Thailand.<sup>39</sup> In a way,

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<sup>34</sup> Anan Ganjanapan, "Village in Thai Society: Conceptual Critiques," in *The Community Dimension: Local Way of Thinking Regarding Rights, Power and Natural Resource Management* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2001), 56. (in Thai)

<sup>35</sup> Anan Ganjanapan, "Community Rights in Development," in *The Community Dimension: Local Way of Thinking Regarding Rights, Power and Natural Resource Management* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2001), 246 and 250. (in Thai)

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 236 and 244.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 241 and 243.

<sup>38</sup> For example, see Prayong Doklamyai, "From Discourse to Practical Innovation: Land Reform by Communities. Transcript of the Presentation at a Conference on Anan Ganjanapan's Complexity of Rights, 8 March 2008," in *"I Don't Have the Answer": 60 Years Professor Dr. Anan Ganjanapan and 20 Years of Social Movement on Community Rights and Natural Resources Management* (Chiang Mai: Sustainable Development Foundation, 2008), 251. (in Thai)

<sup>39</sup> Achara Rakyutitham, "Anan's Dynamic: From Culture, Na-Moo to Complexity," in *"I Don't Have the Answer": 60 Years Professor Dr. Anan Ganjanapan and 20 Years of Social Movement on Community Rights and Natural Resources Management* (Chiang Mai: Sustainable Development

CLTD can be seen as ideational extensions of community forest ideas regarding the management of some forest land.<sup>40</sup>

As some have argued, communities do not always engage in the defense of the commons and often want private land rights.<sup>41</sup> The LRM and CLTD groups have not claimed to speak for all communities in Thailand. In some places, LRM groups assert their ancestral rights to land, but generally, CLTD can be seen as a recently constructed land governance mechanism not preservations of traditional social governance structures. In sum, CLTD is a form of local land governance based on democratic rule-setting, where members are allocated individual plots of land to use for agricultural and housing purposes. CLTD reflects the complexity of rights concept as land is owned collectively (such as in the form of a co-operative), while individual members receive the right to use individual plots of land.<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that CLTD does not imply giving exclusive rights to local groups, but that other parties such as the state and civil society can be involved in the governance of natural resources in a form of checks and balances.<sup>43</sup> CLTD is discussed in greater detail in part 2

Main ideas embedded in CLTD are that land is not merely a commodity, and that secure land tenure for small-scale farmers is a matter of social justice with implication towards poverty reduction.<sup>44</sup> In CLTD projects, land is de-commodified in the sense that members cannot sell their individual land plots through market

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Foundation, 2008), 14. For more information on community forests see: Matsumura (1994); Johnson and Forsyth (2002); Zurcher (2005); Salam, Noguchi, and Pothitan, (2006).

<sup>40</sup> Doklamyai (2008), 251.

<sup>41</sup> Hall, Hirsch, and Li (2012), 13-14.

<sup>42</sup> Prof. Dr. Anan Ganjanapan, lecturer of Sociology and Anthropology, Chiang Mai university, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Land Reform Network and Local Act (2010), 10 and Singsootham (2011), 23.

channels, and can only sell their usage rights back to the group at pre-arranged non-market prices. This also helps to prevent land grabs and to secure land tenure for members, as well as future generations.<sup>45</sup> This does not mean, however, that the younger generations are "locked-in" to the farming profession. As discussed by Ganjanapan, CLTD should be seen as "cushions" or safety nets for marginalised people, especially in time of economic crisis, given that existing market governance structures are biased in favour of large capital. From this perspective, CLTD ideas and practice should be seen as a strategic adaptive tool to empower marginalised people, particularly in the short and medium run, rather than a static universal solution. In this contemporary period, agriculture is still one of the primary sources of income that requires little capital investment.<sup>46</sup> However, without their own land, farm workers can be a risky profession in terms of health and employment opportunities. With access to land, at least these people will have some kind of life security.<sup>47</sup> As part 2 discusses in greater depth, the economic necessity of having nil or insufficient land after the 1997 Asian economic crisis prompted some people to occupy land and to join the LRM.<sup>48</sup> Some LRM members also discuss during interviews how their aging physical conditions prevent them from continuing to work as low-skilled labourers in the industrial sector, and that gaining access to land in CLTD projects help them to earn income.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Rangsan Sansongkwaee, LRM local leader from Ban Raidong, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun; Long Pechsood, Bantad Mountain group, Ampur Palian, Trang, interviewed 1 October 2012, Bangkok; Wacharin Ouprajong, Baan Huafai, Ampur Chaiprakarn, Chiang Mai, interviewed Nonthaburi, 30 September 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>46</sup> Anan Ganjanapan, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>47</sup> Anan Ganjanapan interviewed in Rakyutitham et al. (2005), 201.

<sup>48</sup> Achara Rakyutitham et al. (2005), 118-119.

<sup>49</sup> Mr. Nop Mangkornmai and Mr. Jai Kiti, Raidong/Mae-aow members, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun. Also, to a certain extent, Mr. Boonlue Jaroenmee, Klongyong Co-operative, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom.

Owing to environmental and food security concerns,<sup>50</sup> as well as a strategic need to gain acceptance from wider society,<sup>51</sup> the LRM and its CLTD discourse also promote sustainable management of natural resource and agricultural production. At least at the leadership level, CLTD is portrayed as a mechanism to safeguard agricultural land for small-scale farmers for food security and for the development of sustainable agricultural food production.<sup>52</sup> Part 3 discusses attempts to promote sustainable agriculture in greater detail.

It is recognised that not everyone in the same areas as that of CLTD projects agree with the LRM's ideas. Even within LRM community groups, there are still a lot of disparity in terms of understanding and acceptance of CLTD ideas,<sup>53</sup> not to mention some feelings of alienation with academic terms used by some members of the LRM.<sup>54</sup> It has been noted that original CLTD communities in the North tend to have firm beliefs in CLTD principles, whereas late-comer groups only joined the movement because they saw an opening of political space which might allow them to gain access to land.<sup>55</sup> Many people joined the LRM not necessary because they believe in CLTD ideas, but because they hope to increase their bargaining power and, in the case that they receive CLTD from the state, to stop harassment from the

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<sup>50</sup> Members of the LRM who criticise industrial agriculture or are concerned with environmental degradation include, for example, Direk Kong-ngern, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai and Long Pechsood, Bantad Mountain group, Ampur Palian, Trang, 1 October 2012, Bangkok.

<sup>51</sup> Land Reform Network and Local Act (2010), 11.

<sup>52</sup> Pongthip Samranjit, "A Summary of Research on Ground-up Land Reforms by Communities," July 22, 2011, <<http://www.landreformthai.net>> (in Thai)

<sup>53</sup> Ms. Sawitta Teeronwattanakul, Northern Peasants Federation activist, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai; Mr. Pachoen Choosang, Bantad Mountain group, Trang, 1 October 2012, Bangkok; Mr. Boonlue Jaroenmee, Klongyong Co-operative, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom.

<sup>54</sup> Mr. Sukaew Fungfoo, President of the Baan Pae-tai CLTD project, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>55</sup> Ms. Chuleerat Jaroenpon, researcher on the LRM and lecturer from Faculty of Social Innovation, Rangsit University, interviewed 4 October 2012, Pathumthani.

authorities.<sup>56</sup> Some CLTD members prefer to receive individual title deeds but settle for CLTD because they think there is no chance that they will receive the former.<sup>57</sup> It took a while, for example, for a majority of Klongyong co-operative members to mobilise, join the LRM and promote CLTD, because initially they were used to trusting and obeying the bureaucracy. By 2012, there were still a few people in the minority who disagree with the CLTD approach and prefer to have individual title deeds.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, many Klongyong members eventually became convinced of the benefits of CLTD because it guarantees that at least their children will have some access to land.<sup>59</sup> Those in other CLTD projects also reflect similar sentiments. For example, a member of Bantad Mountain group reflects how "money runs out...but land is an asset that we have to protect and give to future generations."<sup>60</sup>

Counter-hegemonic ideas of the LRM resonate with some academic literature and global counter-hegemonic initiatives which similarly question whether the current private property right regime helps to ensure security of tenure.<sup>61</sup> For example, the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD), which was organised by FAO and Brazil in March 2006 in Porto Alegre, helps to form a new normative basis for future international land governance that

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<sup>56</sup> For example, Mr. Rachata Ranghiri, LRM farmer from Tambol Mae-faeg, Chiang Mai, interviewed during the demonstration in front of Government House, 1 October 2012, Bangkok, and Mr. Jai Kiti, Mae-aow member in the Raidong/Mae-aow CLTD project, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>57</sup> Boonlue Jaroenmee, Klongyong Co-operative leader, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom  
<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Mrs. Wantana Iamsuwan, one of the nine management committee members, Klongyong Co-operative, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom, and Mrs. Wilaiwan Konka, Vice-president of Baan Pae-tai CLTD project, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>60</sup> Pachoen Choosang, Bantad Mountain group, Trang, interviewed 1 October 2012, Bangkok.

<sup>61</sup> De Schutter (2011), 268-269. Also see W. Assies, "Land Tenure, Land Law and Development: Some Thoughts on Recent Debates," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 36, no. 3 (2009): 573-589, quoted in De Schutter (2011), 269; Matias E. Margulis, Nora McKeon, and Saturnino M. Borras, "Land Grabbing and Global Governance: Critical Perspectives," *Globalizations* 10, no. 1 (2013), 12; Marc Edelman et al., "Introduction: Critical Perspectives on Food Sovereignty," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 41, no. 6 (October 15, 2014), 923.

also include collective land rights.<sup>62</sup> Contrary to neo-liberal economic thinking, it has been suggested that limiting land sales can protect small-scale farmers from being pressured to cede their land and protect usage rights over communal land.<sup>63</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food argues that allowing the emergence of a market for rental rights is a more pro-poor option compare to individual titling schemes which imply the marketability of land rights. Alternatives to individual titling include the adoption of anti-eviction laws in combination with the registration of use rights based on customary forms of tenure.<sup>64</sup> While restrictions on land sales prevent further commodification of land, formal legal recognition of customary rights can provide effective security, promote access to credit, and long-term investment on the land.<sup>65</sup> In addition, distributing land to small-scale farmers can be used to promote productive, equitable, and environmentally sustainable use of land.<sup>66</sup>

The LRM receives help from a few media channels such as ThaiPBS to spread its ideas. It also links up with other groups in society, often under the name P-Move or People's Movement for a Just Society, which is an umbrella organisation consisting of 10 networks including the Four-Region Slum Network, the Assembly of the Poor's Pakmun group, and the Contract Farmer Network. Other allies include Local Act Organisation, Southern Fishermen Network, and the Alternative

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<sup>62</sup> Margulis, McKeon and Borras (2013), 7.

<sup>63</sup> J.W. Bruce et al., *Land Law Reform: Achieving Development Policy Objectives*. *World Bank Law, Justice, and Development Series* (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2008), quoted in De Schutter (2011), 271.

<sup>64</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, "Access to Land and the Right to Food, Interim Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, to the 65th Session of the General Assembly, UN Doc. A/65/281," 2010, quoted in De Schutter (2011), 271.

<sup>65</sup> For an example from India, see: K. Deininger, S. Jin, and H.K. Nagarajan, "Efficiency and Equity Impacts of Rural Land Market Restrictions: Evidence from India. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper Series 3013" (2006), quoted in De Schutter, 271.

<sup>66</sup> De Schutter (2011), 258.

Agriculture Network.<sup>67</sup> There are also many international collaborations and exchanges of ideas. After land occupations in the North, many leading members visited Brazil's Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST),<sup>68</sup> the Zapatista in Mexico, and the land movement in Peru.<sup>69</sup> Site visits and exchanges of ideas inspired the LRM in Thailand but many people also commented on very different social contexts in those countries compare to Thailand.<sup>70</sup> The LRM is also a member of La Vía Campesina (through the Northern Peasants Federation) and participations in international conferences also help to promote interests in the problems of the global agri-food system, as well as the principles of food sovereignty.<sup>71</sup>

This part of the chapter has discussed the LRM's critique of hegemonic land governance and the LRM's counter-hegemonic ideas, specifically complexity of rights ideas and CLTD. The next part of the chapter discusses in greater detail how land occupiers in Northern Thailand practice CLTD governance, and how the LRM also tries to challenge hegemonic national land governance structures by calling for the establishment of land banks and progressive land taxation.

## **Part 2: Counter-hegemonic governance of land**

This part of the chapter discusses the LRM's campaign for counter-hegemonic land governance which encompasses two dimensions: 1) the development of CLTD as practical examples of democratic local governance of land and; 2) a national campaign to challenge hegemonic legal and policy governance structures. Sections

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<sup>67</sup> See a longer list in Rakyutitham et al. (2005), 32.

<sup>68</sup> Interviews with various people such as Prayong Doklamyai (1st November 2012, Chiang Mai), Direk Kong-ngern (31 October 2012, Chiang Mai), Wacharin Uprachong (30 September 2012, Bangkok), Switta Teeronwattanakul (29 October 2012, Chiang Mai), Rangsang Sansongkwae (30 October 2012, Lamphun), and Montri Bualoi (31 October 2012, Chiang Mai).

<sup>69</sup> Land Reform Network and Local Act (2010), 7.

<sup>70</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai and Rangsang Sansongkwae, Baan Raidong, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>71</sup> Direk Kong-ngern, Baan Pong, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.



2.1 and 2.2 discuss these dimensions. Arguably, the CLTD democratic form of local land governance helps to challenge hegemonic hierarchical ideas and informal social relations discussed in chapter 3. National mobilisation as a social movement also helps to alter members' mentality; from those who tend to wait for help from the bureaucracy to citizens who feel that they can negotiate with the Thai state, as well as participate in the decision making process and natural resource management.<sup>72</sup> Section 2.3 takes a step back to explore potential limitations of CLTD and ALRO as counter-hegemonic projects. This section also discusses how CLTD and ALRO can continue to change and adapt over time to overcome their limitations, but suggests that it is unlikely for any single form of land governance to be a universally appropriate counter-hegemonic solution that fits all occasions.

### ***2.1) Ground-up land reform and CLTD***

As previously discussed, the agricultural sector in Thailand can be seen as a kind of social safety net for low-skilled workers. After the Asian economic crisis in 1997, a lot of workers in Thailand lost their jobs in the industrial and service sectors and returned home to rural parts of the country. In some places, they found that common land they were once able to use, such as to grow and harvest food, had become private properties often owned by people from outside of the communities for speculative purposes and are left un-utilised. The economic necessity of having nil or insufficient land for subsistence and to produce in exchange for income prompted

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<sup>72</sup> As reflected by, for example, Boonlue Jaroenmee, Klongyong Co-operative leader, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom.

many people in the North to form groups to occupy land in their local communities.<sup>73</sup>

Land occupations in the North, which started around 1998 in Lamphun and Chiang Mai, have developed into the ideas and practice of CLTD which are then accepted by many groups in other parts of the country. In many places, land conflicts arise from contestations between citizens and the Thai state over the boundaries of reserved forest.<sup>74</sup> Generally, CLTD members are allocated some private plots of land for agricultural purposes, but minor parts of these land can be used as living spaces. Land use and exchanges are locally governed to make sure those who receive access to each plot of land truly work on the land, as well as to prevent land grabs. Usage rights to individual land plots can be inherited, and those who would like to return their plots of land to the group will receive compensation according to pre-arranged non-market prices. Members have regular meetings such as to discuss community development progress. Depending on groups, members are able to participate in the collective management of land and other collective decisions through direct voting and/or by voting to select representatives to make day-to-day decisions.

This section first discusses CLTD projects in the North (Baan Sritia, Baan Pae-tai, Baan Raidong/Mae-aow and Baan Pong), which were the focus of site visits. Then, prominent CLTD examples in other parts of the country are discussed, such as Bantad Mountain group and Suratthani's land reform groups in the South, Samsiew group in the Northeast, and Klongyong co-operative in the Central region. The

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<sup>73</sup> Rakyutitham et al. (2005), 118-119. Most land occupiers interviewed seem to agree on this point such as Rangsan Sansongkwaee and other members from Raidong/Mae-aow such as Jai Kitti, Nop Mangkornmai, and Oonjai Akaruan (interviewed 30 October 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Examples include Bantad Mountain in the South (Pachoen Choosang and Long Pechsood, LRM member from Bantad Mountain group, interviewed 1 October 2012, Bangkok) and other cases such as in Naan (Mr. Wichai, a LRM farmer member from Ampur Wiangsa, Naan province, interviewed during the demonstration in front of Government House, 1 October 2012, Bangkok).

examples suggest that, while the nature of land conflicts and practice of CLTD can be quite different, these groups are similar with regards to their acceptance of land reform goals and main CLTD principles.

### ***LRM groups in the North and the origin of CLTD***

Sritia was considered the first village that started to occupy and allocate land to members. The land movement in Sritia started around 1989 when the Nongplasawai land re-distribution project of 15,000 rai, which also included common land (ป่าชุมชน), was unsuccessful and hence allowed people from Chiang Mai and Bangkok to apply for land titling in these areas. Locals from Baan Sanpooluey, Sri-tia, and Nong-khiad in Lamphun then started to protest but the movement halted after one leader was assassinated.<sup>75</sup> By 1995, members of Baan Sritia created governing rules to prevent outsiders (whom they refer to as "capitalists") from using common land in their community area. Pressured by the effects of the Asian economic crisis, some locals started to occupy and divide the land for individual usage in 1997.<sup>76</sup> One of its leader, Mr. Thana Yasopa, also joined the Assembly of the Poor's protest in Bangkok in 1997 to pressure the government to solve land problems.<sup>77</sup> Sritia land occupiers consisted of both young and old people and managed to build allies in other groups of society such as lawyers.<sup>78</sup> Discussions on the lack of land between Sritia and other villages also spurred land occupations in nine nearby villages between 1997 and

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<sup>75</sup> Kingkarn Samnuanyen, *Dynamics of Social Movement Tactics: The Case of the Land Rights Movement in Lamphun province. An Unpublished Masters Thesis at the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University* (Bangkok, 2006), 68 (in Thai); Rakyutitham et al. (2005), 116.

<sup>76</sup> Samnuanyen (2006), 69 and 80.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 75 and 78.

2002, including Baan Pae-tai which occupied around 200 rai of land,<sup>79</sup> Baan Raidong/Mae-aow in Lamphun, and Baan Pong in Chiang Mai.

On 9 November 2000, around 300 people from Raidong, Mae-aow and Nongsamanatai villages occupied around 426 rai of land which was left unused for around 30 to 40 years. In 2001, the land reform network in Lamphun managed to pressure Lamphun's governor to set up a committee to investigate land problems.<sup>80</sup> With regards to the Raidong/Mae-aow case, the Nanthakwang family initially claimed ownership over 426 rai of land occupied by the locals but official investigation found that only 290 rai were covered by legal deeds<sup>81</sup> which supposedly belong to ALRO.<sup>82</sup> After land occupation, participants measured total land area to allocate land equally to approximately 282 members (around 1 rai per each member). If members no longer require the land for productive purposes, they can sell their usage rights back to the group and receive some pre-agreed monetary compensation for their work on the land, which is not as high as the market price. This measure aims to prevent the community from losing control over the land and to ensure that land are used productively by small-scale farmers. Later on, such principles of local-level land governance became known as community land title deed (CLTD).<sup>83</sup> Raidong/Mae-aow group also keeps 10 rai of land as common land, which have been used to grow crops to earn income for the group's collective fund.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 81 and 83. By 2012, Baan Pae-tai had around 70 members, which is less than when they first started to occupy land (Mr. Sukaew Fungfoo, President of the Baan Pae-tai CLTD project, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun).

<sup>80</sup> Samnuyanyen (2006), 92.

<sup>81</sup> Phu Chiangdao, "Lamphun Land: Our Heart Is the Land," in *Land of Life*, ed. Ngao-sil Kongkaew and Phu Chiangdao (Nonthaburi: Local Act and Community Organisations Development Institute, 2010), 190-193. (in Thai)

<sup>82</sup> Rangsan Sansongkwae, Baan Raidong, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>83</sup> Chiang-dao (2010), 198-199, 203, and Rangsan Sansongkwae, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>84</sup> Interviews with Rangsan Sansongkwae, Nop Mangkornmai and Oonjai Akaruan, 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

Another strong CLTD group in the North which learned from the experience of Sritia and Raidong/Mae-aow is Baan Pong in Chiang Mai. The group consists of around 79 households or 412 members<sup>85</sup> who occupied over 458 rai of land.<sup>86</sup> Initially, the land were common land that were sold off to people outside of the community for speculation purposes, real estate projects, or as securities to take out loans, but since then been mostly foreclosed by banks.<sup>87</sup> Baan Pong members occupied the land in 2002 because of economic pressures from having insufficient farm land, which became more acute after the 1997 Asian economic crisis.<sup>88</sup> In Baan Pong CLTD project, around 60 percent of land is used for agricultural production, 30 percent for housing, and 10 percent for common purposes (guesthouse, meeting place, collective farm, roads).<sup>89</sup> Each household receives around 2 rai of land for private usage.<sup>90</sup> Individual usage rights of land can be passed on to their children, but members must not sell the land without the approval of the management committee nor leave the land unutilised for more than 2 years.<sup>91</sup>

Baan Pong members elect 5 committee officers and meet every month to vote on issues affecting the community.<sup>92</sup> In addition, members contribute either personal labour or money for agri-food production in collective land to raise money for Baan Pong's community fund.<sup>93</sup> An interesting feature of Baan Pong is the establishment of the community's "land bank" which serves as a community welfare fund, a source

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<sup>85</sup> Singsootham (2010), 36.

<sup>86</sup> Land Reform Network and Local Act (2010), 235.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 235 and Direk Kong-ngern, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>88</sup> Pongthip Samranjit et al., *A Documental Report on the Research on What Thailand Will Lose without Land Reform: Land Management and Social Justice - a Case Study of the Land Reform Network in Thailand* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 2012), 231 (in Thai) and The Land Reform Network and Local Act (2010), 224.

<sup>89</sup> Land Reform Network and Local Act (2010), 236.

<sup>90</sup> Singsootham (2010), 39-40.

<sup>91</sup> Land Reform Network and Local Act (2010), 233-234. Also, Direk Kong-ngern and Montri Bualoi, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>92</sup> Samranjit et al. (2012), 233 and Mr. Direk Kong-ngern, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>93</sup> Direk Kong-ngern, Baan Pong, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

of loans for agricultural purposes, and as a fund for political mobilisation. If the fund becomes significant enough, it will also be used to purchase land. The source of funding comes from compulsory monthly saving and exchanges of individual land usage rights; out of 30,000 baht price per plot of land, 10,000 baht is given to the original user of land, 16,000 baht to the land bank, and 4,000 baht to Baan Pong communal fund.<sup>94</sup> The LRM's attempt to pressure the state to establish land banks at the national scale is discussed in section 2.2.

### *CLTD in the South and Northeast*

Ideas of the LRM and CLTD land governance practice in the North spread to other regions of the country through many channels, such as through the media and existing civil society networks, which gained the movement more allies. The following paragraphs explore the diversity of CLTD projects using examples from the South and Northeast, namely Bantad Mountain group where members are located across Trang, Krabi and Pattaloong provinces (South), as well as Sai-ngarmpattana groups in Suratthani province (South) and Samsiew group in Chaiphum province (Northeast). The examples suggest that CLTD practices differ depending on local contexts, and that one should be cautious not to analyse the LRM as a homogenous movement.

Bantad Mountain group consists of around 80 households or 400 people who occupy over 2,100 rai of land in mountainous area.<sup>95</sup> Most members claim that their ancestors had lived in the area long before the Thai state declared it a reserve forest

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<sup>94</sup> Land Reform Network and Local Act (2010), 235.

<sup>95</sup> Ngao-sin Kongkaew, *The Event Occured at Bantad Mountains* (Bangkok: Bantad Mountain Land Reform Network and the Thai Health Organisation, 2011), 116. (in Thai)

area and started to arrest some of the locals in 1989.<sup>96</sup> Baan Tra community in Trang province were influenced by the Communist movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Since 1991, some members started to mobilise to assert their right to their ancestors' land.<sup>97</sup> They joined the Assembly of the Poor and exchanged ideas with their "brothers and sisters" from other regions of Thailand, who faced similar problems relating to the control over natural resources.<sup>98</sup>

On 14 October 2000, Bantad Mountain Land Reform Network was established, consisting of 15 member organisations from Trang, Krabi and Pattaloong provinces.<sup>99</sup> Around 1,200 rai of Bantad Mountain land are used for agricultural and housing purposes while the other 900 rai are designated community forest area.<sup>100</sup> Bantad group adopts a CLTD style of local land governance where the community manifesto and rules, such as regarding natural resource management and saving groups, are established by democratic means.<sup>101</sup> It has also been noted that women are active participants in day-to-day community management of resources as well as in political mobilisation.<sup>102</sup> Since Bantad is a remote area bordered with well-preserved forests, Bantad group tries to establish rules to prevent the destruction of the forest, water resource and wild life, such as to promote little or no usage of agricultural chemicals<sup>103</sup> and to require additional trees to be planted when members need to cut down some trees.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 130 and 135. Also Pachoen Choosang, LRM member from Bantad Mountain group, Trang, interviewed during the demonstration in front of Government House, 1 October 2012, Bangkok.

<sup>97</sup> Kongkaew (2011), 136-147.

<sup>98</sup> Pachoen Choosang, Bantad Mountain group, interviewed 1 October 2012, Bangkok.

<sup>99</sup> Singsootham (2010), 53.

<sup>100</sup> Kongkaew (2011), 116.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 66 and Pachoen Choosang, Bantad Mountain group, interviewed 1 October 2012, Bangkok.

<sup>102</sup> Pachoen Choosang, Bantad Mountain group, interviewed 1 October 2012, Bangkok.

<sup>103</sup> Kongkaew (2011), 67.

<sup>104</sup> Long Pechsood, Bantad Mountain group, interviewed 1 October 2012, Bangkok.

The experience of Suratthani's land movement in the South is markedly different from the previous groups discussed. Santipattana, Klongsaipattana, and Sai-ngarmpattana communities were accepted as part of the 35 pilot CLTD projects during the Abhisit administration in 2010, and yet violent oppositions against land reform members in these communities did not cease. As briefly discussed in chapter 3, there are a lot of large-scale palm oil plantations in Suratthani.<sup>105</sup> Out of around 830,000 rai of palm oil plantations in the province, only 10 percent belong to (around 29,000) farming households.<sup>106</sup> In a 3,000-rai plantation owned by a capital group, only 20 people were hired as labour.<sup>107</sup> Many Thai and foreign companies received license to rent a total of around 200,000 rai of reserve forest areas in Suratthani, and some palm oil plantations continued their operation even though their license (over 68,500 rai of land in total) had already expired.<sup>108</sup> Since around 2002, there were large-scale land occupations and some violent retaliations.<sup>109</sup> In 2008, six communities - Santipattana, Klongsaipattana, and Sai-ngarmpattana 1 to 4 - formed the Southern Peasants Federation and joined the LRM, calling for the state to redistribute land and for legal persecutions of private companies whose plantation license already expired.<sup>110</sup> By 2010, ALRO took back some of the land under their jurisdiction from private companies so that around 400 small-scale farmers could use the land.<sup>111</sup> However, there are still some violent conflicts during the time of research, as section 4.1 discusses.

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<sup>105</sup> Land Reform Network and Local Act (2010), 106.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-113.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.



A relatively new CLTD project includes Samsiew which adopted the CLTD land governance approach in 2007.<sup>112</sup> Land struggles in Samsiew, however, started since 1932 when the state declared common land over some people's land and tried to evict them.<sup>113</sup> The community which consisted of 24 households in 401 rai of land created its own manifesto which outlines member-agreed rules regarding collective land ownership and management.<sup>114</sup> Unlike Bantad Mountain group which encourages all members to participate in the day-to-day decision making process, Samsiew prefers a more indirect democracy management style where members elect 15 representatives to form a management committee.<sup>115</sup> Samsiew members were also inspired by Baan Pong's experience<sup>116</sup> but unlike Baan Pong, the division of land between members is based on existing divisions of land among families.<sup>117</sup> However, those who have a lot of land sometimes informally allow others to work on their land.<sup>118</sup> As part 3 discusses in greater detail, Samsiew is an example of a CLTD project which is committed to develop sustainable agricultural production.

### ***Klongyong co-operative***

While the Raidong/Mae-aow group received a certificate from the Prime Minister office to support its existence as a CLTD project, the legal status of the certificate is not the same as a land title deed signed by the Department of Land.<sup>119</sup> By 2014, Klongyong co-operative which covers a total area of around 1,803 rai and consists of

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<sup>112</sup> Singsootham (2010), 72.

<sup>113</sup> Mr. Hemrach Lobnongbua quoted in Prachathai News, "Report from the Seminar 'CLTD and Solutions to Land Conflicts in Thailand,'" *Prachathai Online News*, July 04, 2009. (in Thai) Also Singsootham (2010), 7 and 70-71.

<sup>114</sup> Singsootham (2010), 72 and 74.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>116</sup> Hemrach Lobnongbua quoted in Prachathai (2009).

<sup>117</sup> Singsootham (2010), 74-75.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>119</sup> Rangsans Sansongkwaee, Baan Raidong, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

180 households (969 people)<sup>120</sup> is the only LRM group which received a legal title deed in February 2011 during the Abhisit Vejjachewea administration, which is certified by the Department of Land. This is partly due to its unique status as a rent-to-buy co-operative established in 1980.<sup>121</sup> In 2006, the Co-operative Promotion Department transferred Klongyong land to the treasury department, which then increased land rent significantly from between 3,000 to 4,000 baht to around 40,000 to 50,000 baht per 20 rai per year. In addition, the treasury also allowed non-farmers to rent the land.<sup>122</sup> Most of Klongyong co-operative members then protested against the hike in rental price in 2008, and compiled documents to show that Klongyong co-operative was initially set up as a rent-to-buy land co-operative to help small-scale farmers. In 2009, Klongyong joined the LRM<sup>123</sup> and most members also agreed to adopt the CLTD land management approach.<sup>124</sup>

Klongyong leaders received help from Prapart Pintoptang - an academic from Chulalongkorn University - to bring their problems to national attention.<sup>125</sup> Media exposures from ThaiPBS, a national television news station, also encouraged Klongyong members to be less afraid of local village headmen and treasury department officials.<sup>126</sup> Media exposures also helped Klongyong to build alliances with other groups in similar situations, such as in Utraraditr and Utaithani

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<sup>120</sup> Kom Chad Luek Newspaper, *'Mae-aow villagers smile for the second CLTDs from the Prime Minister'*, March 18, 2011. (in Thai)

<sup>121</sup> Klongyong community leaders, "A Summary of the Struggles of the Klongyong Community (a Document Prepared by the Locals for Visitors), Obtained 10 October 2012," 1-3. (in Thai)

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 and Land Reform Network and Local Act (2010), 322.

<sup>123</sup> Klongyong community leaders (2012), 3.

<sup>124</sup> Boonlue Jaroenmee, Klongyong Co-operative, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom and Shoti Saiyuenyong, one of the nine management committee member, Klongyong Co-operative, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom.

<sup>125</sup> Prapart Pintoptang's family owns some land in the co-operative. (Boonlue Jaroenmee, Klongyong Co-operative, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom)

<sup>126</sup> Boonlue Jaroenmee, Klongyong Co-operative, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom.

provinces.<sup>127</sup> Klongyong has an advantage over other CLTD projects due to its close proximity to Bangkok and its ability to establish a wide supportive network. As section 4.1 discusses, some CLTD groups in other regions face more obstacles such as violent retaliations from landlords, or are at a more disadvantaged position to build national networks and to receive media coverage. In addition, aside from Klongyong and (to a certain extent) Raidong/Mae-aow, CLTD projects will continue to be vulnerable as long as national laws and policies do not support CLTD principles. The next section focuses on the LRM's counter-hegemonic attempts to reform current laws and state policies regarding land governance in Thailand.

## ***2.2) Laws and policies regarding land governance***

Some studies point to the key role of the state in the maintenance of hegemonic land governance and in facilitating land grabs. The state, for example, has the control over the definition and classification of land and is also able to justify large-scale land investments, as well as appropriations and reallocations of land.<sup>128</sup> In addition, it is suggested that land grabs are not merely contests for control over resources, but also contests for authority over institutions.<sup>129</sup> As this section discusses, the LRM also attempts to change the Thai state's legal and policy structures to promote land redistribution and prevention of land grabs, in addition to "ground up" CLTD land reform projects. Building on the community rights discourse and its own experience, by the early 2010s the LRM started to campaign for four laws to be passed to support: 1) progressive land tax; 2) the establishment of land banks; 3) community

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid* and Land Reform Network and Local Act (2010), 317.

<sup>128</sup> For example, see Saturnino M. Borras, Jennifer C. Franco, and Chunyu Wang, "The Challenge of Global Governance of Land Grabbing: Changing International Agricultural Context and Competing Political Views and Strategies," *Globalizations* 10, no. 1 (2013), 167.

<sup>129</sup> Margulis, McKeon, and Borras (2013), 11.

rights in the management of land and natural resource; and 4) the establishment of a Justice Fund to help marginalised citizens with their legal fees.

As previous chapters have discussed, community empowerment is a popular idea among Thai civil society groups and some public intellectuals in Thailand. The 1997 Constitution is the first Constitution which embodies decentralisation of power ideas, such as in Articles 284 and 290, as well as recognises community rights ideas.<sup>130</sup> The 2007 Constitution also recognises community rights in Articles 66 and 67<sup>131</sup> which helps LRM members to legitimise their cause.<sup>132</sup> Many subsidiary laws relating to natural resource management, however, contradict community rights and instead legitimise the centralisation of power in the hands of the government, while laws aimed to decentralise power to local administration are unclear, resulting in the lack of checks and balance system which would allow local citizens to participate in the decision making process.<sup>133</sup> It is suggested that land conflicts occur in roughly 6 types of land including forest, public/common, slum, ALRO, private, and state's land.<sup>134</sup> A lot of land conflicts occur in around 6.4 million rai of forestry areas due to unclear borders.<sup>135</sup> Many people in the LRM argue that sometimes reserved forest areas were declared over populated areas.<sup>136</sup> Forestry laws also give a lot of power to the Ministry of Forestry which supports top-down hierarchical control of the state

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<sup>130</sup> Ittipol Srisaowalak et al., *A Project to Study Appropriate Land Rights for Communities* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2007), 165. (in Thai)

<sup>131</sup> Wich Jeerapat, "Reflection on Thai Community Right Ideas," *Julniti Journal* 3, no. 38 (2010), 40. (in Thai)

<sup>132</sup> A few interviewees refer to the fact that the Thai Constitution recognises community rights, such as Pachoen Choosang, Bantad Mountain group, 1 October 2012, Bangkok.

<sup>133</sup> Ittipol Srisaowalak et al., *A Study Project on the Law to Manage Local Areas* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2001), Abstract page II and III (in Thai) and Kraiyoorawong et al. (2005), 88.

<sup>134</sup> Singsootham (2010), 2.

<sup>135</sup> A Parliamentary Committee to Consider Land Problems (2009), 18.

<sup>136</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 30 September 2012, Nonthaburi.

over natural resource, and contradict community rights ideas and practices in many areas.<sup>137</sup>

The LRM initially focused on revoking formal land title deeds which were not obtained legally but they faced many obstacles. The Department of Land has the authority to revoke land title deeds but rarely does so. Another possible channel is to take individual cases to the administrative court for a ruling, which is a slow and time consuming process. In the case of Raidong/Mae-aow community, a committee consisting of state officials and local citizens found that most of land deeds in areas now occupied by Raidong/Mae-aow members should not had been issued and should be revoked, but it took a long time for the Department of Land to revoke the deeds.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, in legal cases involving land conflicts between individual citizens and the state or private companies, the court tends to give higher weight to titling documents even though they had been obtained through illegitimate practices, compare to witnesses and other lines of arguments, such as arguments based on community rights and anthropological evidence.<sup>139</sup>

Difficulties in revoking formal land deeds led the LRM to advocate other strategies, such as to push for an establishment of land banks funded by progressive land taxation.<sup>140</sup> Since around 2008, the LRM puts forward three main demands for the government: 1) to support CLTD land governance; 2) to establish land banks and; 3) to implement progressive land taxation. The main goal is to re-distribute land

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<sup>137</sup> A Parliamentary Committee to Consider Land Problems (2009), 67.

<sup>138</sup> Sawitta Teeronwattanakul, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>139</sup> For example, anthropological evidence which suggests that the land was previously occupied by local communities since ancestral time (Dr. Permsak Mokarapirom, quoted during the discussion panel on land problems at the second National Reform Assembly, 2012, Bangkok, Thailand). Also see Kraiyoorawong et al. (2005), 88 and other problems in A Parliamentary Committee to Consider Land Problems (2009), 18.

<sup>140</sup> Sawitta Teeronwattanakul, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

in the form of CLTD to groups which have established reliable democratic local governance systems. Land banks, partially funded by progressive land tax, will also aid CLTD by helping to facilitate land purchases for re-distribution to small-scale farmers and as a fund to facilitate land exchanges within CLTD projects.<sup>141</sup> Progressive land taxation is suggested as a measure to encourage those who have large holdings of land to release these land and to discourage land speculations.<sup>142</sup> Some studies have also noted, for example, that land tax has relatively low enforcement costs and is easy to implement, compare to other options.<sup>143</sup> Over the years, the LRM has built alliances with other groups in society such as academics, lawyers, and even a few politicians, as well as linkages with other civil society groups such as the Fishermen Network and Farmer Debt Network.<sup>144</sup> The National Reform Committee led by Prawase Wasi, as well as a Parliamentary Committee to Study Land Problems, also support similar land reform ideas as the LRM such as the enforcement of maximum land holding limit, the establishment of land banks, the protection of agricultural land, and progressive land taxation.<sup>145</sup>

In 2011, the Abhisit Vejjachewa government (December 2008 to August 2011) made a few sympathetic moves. By 31 of January 2012, 435 communities or 242,798 people in around 2.2 million rai of land across 47 provinces in Thailand had

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<sup>141</sup> Singsootham (2010), 30.

<sup>142</sup> A summary based on interviews with various people in the movement and from Pongthip Samranjit, "A summary of research on ground-up land reforms by communities," July 22, 2011, <<http://www.landreformthai.net>>, retrieved November 2012. (in Thai)

<sup>143</sup> V. Songwe and K. Deininger, "Foreign Investment in Agricultural Production: Opportunities and Challenges. Agriculture and Rural Development Notes, Issue 45, World Bank," 2009, quoted in De Schutter (2011), 272.

<sup>144</sup> See Samnuanyen (2006), 110-113.

<sup>145</sup> National Reform Committee, *How to Reform Thailand: A Proposal for Political Parties and Voters* (Bangkok: National Reform Committee, 2011), 22-24 (in Thai) and A Parliamentary Committee to Consider Land Problems, (2009), 61-62, 65 and 68.

applied for CLTDs from the government.<sup>146</sup> Out of 435 communities which had applied for CLTDs, only Klongyong and Raidong/Mae-aow were granted CLTDs on 12 February 2011 and 26 March 2011 respectively.<sup>147</sup> As previously discussed, only Klongyong was given a legal land title deed signed by the Department of Land. In early 2011, the Abhisit government also agreed to a budget of 167 million baht to fund community land banks in five pilot communities, which include Rai-dong/Mae-aow and Baan Pong.<sup>148</sup> This is not to say, however, that the Abhisit government was actively promoting CLTD, national land bank and land reforms. It can be argued that they could have done more by, for example, drafting a law on CLTD instead of relying on the Office of the Prime Minister to issue a CLTD certificate to Raidon/Mae-aow because the certificate has lower legal status.

Succeeding the Abhisit government (Democrat party) in August 2011 was the Yingluck Shinnawatra government (Phua Thai party). In late 2012, interviewees seem to believe that the Yingluck government is not committed to continue the work of the previous regime when it comes to CLTD and land banks, even though Phua Thai party advocated these land reform measures during its election campaign and also in its policy statement after coming into power. The government established a committee to consider land reform proposals suggested by the LRM and promised to speed up the process of passing the law to guarantee community rights in the management of land, forests, water and the sea. However, in practice there was more

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<sup>146</sup> Community Land Title Deeds Office, Prime Minister's Office, "Document for Distribution Regarding the Latest Progress date 31 January 2012",

<<http://www.opm.go.th/OpmInter/content/oclt/default.asp>>, retrieved 24 April 2013. (in Thai)

<sup>147</sup> Kom Chad Luek Newspaper, "Mae-aow Villagers Smile for the Second CLTDs from the Prime Minister," March 18, 2011. (in Thai)

<sup>148</sup> Isra News, "P-move Reminds the Government of the Promises on Land Banks and the Protection of CLTDs Areas," February 23, 2013. (in Thai).

or less no follow-up.<sup>149</sup> The LRM held protests to pressure the government in 2012 and 2013 but to little effect.<sup>150</sup>

Building on the original three proposals, the LRM started to campaign for "four laws for the poor" in 2014<sup>151</sup> which include laws regarding progressive land taxation, land bank and community rights in the management of land and natural resource (CLTD law), as well as a law to support the establishment of a Justice Fund for marginalised citizens who need help with their legal fees.<sup>152</sup> After the coup d'état on 22 May 2014, through Order 64/2557 and the Master Plan to End Deforestation, the military-led government clearly adopted a hard-lined position to remove "encroachers" from reserved forest, which intensified land conflicts between the state and many communities.<sup>153</sup> The LRM continues with its campaign and mobilisation despite martial law. Although the LRM's campaign events are often obstructed by the military,<sup>154</sup> the government seems to take notice of land problems and announces a policy to give 53,000 rai of land to marginalised people through co-operatives between December 2014 and February 2015.<sup>155</sup> However, the policy was criticised by the LRM for being too rushed in its formulation and for its lack of a follow-up evaluation process.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai. Also see P-move Declaration 18, 26 April 2013.

<sup>150</sup> P-move Declaration 18, 26 April 2013.

<sup>151</sup> Drafts of the proposed laws can be found at <<http://www.landwatchthai.com/index.php/th/4>>.

<sup>152</sup> Acharawadee Buaklee, "The North Pushes for 4 Land Laws," *ThaiPBS*, April 04, 2014. (in Thai)

<sup>153</sup> Paul Sullivan and Wilder Nicholson, "Is The Master Plan to Solve the Deforestation or Yet Another Strategy to Remove and Evict People?," December 12, 2014, <<http://www.esaanlandreformnews.com>>.

<sup>154</sup> Matichon Newspaper, "Prapart Pintoptang - Politics Lecturer from Chulalongkorn Was Arrested after Soldiers Cancelled the Walk for Land Reform Event," November 09, 2014. (in Thai)

<sup>155</sup> Isra News, "Concerned That Giving Away 53,000 Rai Plan Will Fail, Prayong Doklamyai Suggests 35 CLTD Pilot Projects Instead," December 07, 2014. (in Thai)

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*



At the time of writing (December 2014), it is unclear how the situation will unfold under the military government. It has been suggested that the LRM almost has to "start from zero" every time there is a change in government.<sup>157</sup> Nevertheless, what seems clear from history is the lack of political will by Thai state managers, civilian or military, to decentralise power and control over the management of natural resource. Similar to the discussion in chapter 3, the autocratic bureaucratic culture entrenched in the Thai state,<sup>158</sup> where issues are "frozen" unless the Prime Minister chairs the committees to solve those particular issues, can be seen as part of the hegemonic structures which obstruct the progress of the LRM. Needless to say, there are also conflict of interests regarding land issues as 507 politicians from 11 main political parties held a total of 35,786 rai of land worth 15.7 million baht in 2013. Phua Thai politicians own an average of 85 rai of land per person, while Democrat politicians own an average of 63 rai of land per person.<sup>159</sup>

Limited success by the LRM to challenge hegemonic laws and national policies serve as obstacles which further constrain the potential of existing CLTD projects. Raidong/Mae-aow and Baan Pong, for example, need legal legitimacy and financial support to purchase some land that they are currently occupying, as well as to develop public utilities in the areas. However, the lack of policy clarity obstructed these developments.<sup>160</sup> Aside from the constraints of national laws and policies, the

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<sup>157</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, Northern Peasants, interviewed 30 September 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>158</sup> Kraiyoowong et al. (2005), 87.

<sup>159</sup> Research based on information from the Office of the National Anti-Corruption Commission, June 2013, by Dr. Duangmanee Laowakul, Faculty of Economics, Thammasart University, quoted in "Landlords from 11 Political Parties Hold 35,000 Rai: Phua Thai, Democrat and Phumjaithai in the Lead," *Prachachat Turakijj (online)*, June 19, 2014. (in Thai)

<sup>160</sup> Interviews from community leaders such as Direk Kong-ngern, Montri Bualoi (from Ban-Pong village, interview date 31 October 2012), Rangsan Sansonkwae and Sangwal Kantham (30 October 2012, Rai-dong/Mae-aow villages, Lamphun), as well as Sarawut Wongnikorn, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 30 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

next section discusses other potential limitations of CLTD and ALRO forms of land governance. Part 4 then continues the discussion on obstacles facing the LRM.

### ***2.3) Possible limitations to the potential of CLTD and ALRO land governance***

This chapter has focused on CLTD and ground-up land reform initiatives of the LRM. However, the thesis recognises that CLTD is not necessarily the best form of property ownership that is appropriate in all contexts.<sup>161</sup> There can be other forms of counter-hegemonic governance mechanisms and complementary measures that can help guard against land grabs, as well as to ensure access to land by small-scale farmers on the basis of farmer rights and food security or food sovereignty. This section discusses some potential limitations of CLTD and ALRO, as they are the most important form of land governance and institution concerned with small-scale farmers' access to land. Other counter-hegemonic governance measures are beyond the scope of this thesis. The discussion in this section suggests that CLTD and ALRO as land governance mechanisms have their merits and limitations, and should be seen as evolving governance mechanisms which can be adapted to suit changing social contexts.

As discussed previously, CLTD has much potential as a local land governance mechanism to encourage small-scale farmers' access to land and to guard against land grabs. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that CLTD projects may only work in areas with strong family relations and/or a sense of community such as in Baan Pong, which help them to organise and collaborate.<sup>162</sup> In most places, such as in the Central region and areas near the cities, such a sense of community probably

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<sup>161</sup> For a similar view, see Edelman et al. (2014), 924.

<sup>162</sup> Samranjit et al. (2012), 220. Also, interviews with Direk Kong-ngern, Baan Pong, Chiang Mai (31 October 2012, Bangkok) and Pachern Chu-saeng, Bantad Mountain group (1 October 2012, Bangkok).

no longer exists (or never existed in the first place). Moreover, by 2014, most land occupations and CLTD projects are on marginal land. There is also a question of whether the second generation of CLTD members will adhere to the principles of CLTD.<sup>163</sup> Arguably, the LRM could also do more in their national campaigns, such as to push for a reform of the process to revoke land deeds that were improperly obtained.

Despite these questions and potential problems, one could still argue that the main benefits of CLTD and of the LRM are that they stimulate debates on how to implement equitable distribution and just governance of resources. Practical examples of CLTD can be used as inspirations, and to show that that people can organise to empower themselves so that they have more say in Thai society. This could be a stepping stone towards the building up of larger social movements which, through further discussions and collaborations, might push for other (perhaps even better) demands that contest the current centralisation of political-economic power and hegemonic land governance. Moreover, CLTD projects provide short-term economic relief for marginalised people. As Anan Ganjanapan argues, CLTD might not provide a long-term solution but for now it does provide cushions against economic downturns for marginalised people and small-scale farmers/farm labourers.<sup>164</sup>

To a certain extent, CLTD was created as a reaction to the perceived ineffectiveness of ALRO in preventing re-distributed land from being sold off to non-farmers. In the early 2010s, however, it seems that ALRO has rather genuinely been trying to improve its performance. With the help of satellite photographs,

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<sup>163</sup> Weerachai Narkwibulwong, Secretary General of ALRO, interviewed 14 February 2013, Bangkok.

<sup>164</sup> Anan Ganjanapan, Chiang Mai University, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

ALRO can sue and re-take misused land more efficiently compare to the past where they lacked human resources to inspect over 30 million rai of ALRO land.<sup>165</sup> Although it is still difficult for ALRO to take on some politically and economically powerful landlords, ALRO hopes to send a message that it is taking the issue seriously to encourage other landlords to start releasing ALRO land in their holdings.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, ALRO considers altering its rules to allow for some compensation (perhaps 55 percent of land price) when farmers want to return their land, to act as an incentive for farmers to return land to ALRO so that ALRO can allocate land to other farmers.<sup>167</sup> However, despite the fact that ALRO has jurisdiction over 29.3 percent of agricultural land in Thailand, most of them are marginal land with poor soil quality in rain-fed or dry areas. Only 2.9 percent of ALRO land are in irrigated areas.<sup>168</sup> The Secretary General of ALRO argues that the state has the legitimacy to safeguard prime agricultural areas for food security purposes because a lot of public investments were spent on irrigation in these areas, such as in Klong Rangsit area. However, so far there is no national policy to do so.<sup>169</sup>

The discussion on ALRO above suggests that one should not be too quick to rule out ALRO as a counter-hegemonic potential despite its past problems. Moreover, although ALRO and CLTD land governance seem like polar opposites - top-down bureaucratic management versus ground-up democratic local management - there is still room for collaborations and exchanges of ideas. As section 3.3 of this

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<sup>165</sup> Weerachai Narkwibulwong, interviewed 14 February 2013, Bangkok; Narkwibulwong (2012), 20; "Taking Back 5 Million Rai of ALRO Land," *Post Today*, September 29, 2014. Another source suggests ALRO has 34.76 million rai of land under its jurisdiction in 2014 (Dr. Duangmanee Laowakul, Faculty of Economics, Thammasart University, quoted in "Macro View of Land," *Isra News*, July 14, 2014.)

<sup>166</sup> Weerachai Narkwibulwong, interviewed 14 February 2013, Bangkok.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Narkwibulwong (2012), 37.

<sup>169</sup> Weerachai Narkwibulwong, interviewed 14 February 2013, Bangkok.

chapter discusses, the LRM and (the current policy direction of ) ALRO are also both receptive of sustainable agriculture.

### **Part 3: Counter-hegemonic production-distribution practices**

The previous part of the chapter has discussed the LRM's attempts to promote land reform and build counter-hegemonic land governance. This part of the chapter discusses another counter-hegemonic goal of the LRM, which is to promote sustainable agricultural production-distribution practices. Section 3.1 reviews relevant literature and the LRM's recognition that to address land grabs and access to land for small-scale farmers, one has to address structural production-distribution problems of the mainstream agri-food system as well. This section also discusses linkages between the LRM and sustainable agriculture groups in Thailand. Section 3.2 then discusses the development of sustainable agriculture in CLTD projects, while section 3.3 discusses ALRO's promotion of sustainable agriculture as a parallel counter-hegemonic attempt.

#### ***3.1) Land and sustainable agriculture***

It has been suggested that land grabs should be seen as "control grabbing" or contests over the future of global agriculture regarding what should be grown, how, by whom, and for what markets.<sup>170</sup> Although studies on land grabs tend to focus on the role of companies and states, it has been pointed out that small-scale farmers can also be seen as potential agents of land grabbing to grow cash crops (boom crops), where the consequences are not that dissimilar from large-scale plantations.<sup>171</sup>

Contract eucalyptus farming arrangements by smallholders in Thailand with an

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<sup>170</sup> Margulis, McKeon, Borras (2013), 3 and 14.

<sup>171</sup> Derek Hall, "Land Grabs, Land Control, and Southeast Asian Crop Booms," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 4 (October 2011), 838.

average holding of 30 to 50 rai, for example, were quite common and were encouraged by the Royal Forestry Department between 1994 and 1997.<sup>172</sup> As the following paragraphs discuss, the LRM's concerns are not limited to egalitarian land re-distribution but also sustainable agricultural production.

At the leadership level (farmer leaders, NGOs and academics), the goals of the LRM include safeguarding agricultural land and promoting sustainable agriculture to counter problems of the current agri-food system.<sup>173</sup> As Prayong Doklamyai suggests, one cannot address the problems of land by analysing land in a vacuum or as being isolated from other issues.<sup>174</sup> Realising that production and marketing of agri-food products are related to small-scale farmers' ability to hold on to their land, some of the leading members were initially very idealistic and wanted to develop all CLTD projects as sustainable agricultural areas. For example, Mr. Suebsakul Kijnukorn who, along with the Raidong/Mae-aow community, was credited for being one of the originators of CLTD term, suggests that land reform is a base for food sovereignty and food security.<sup>175</sup> Some people in the movement also wanted to reject mono-crops in favour of diversified farms<sup>176</sup> and looked for alternatives to the capitalist economy, such as from sufficiency principles and sustainable agriculture.<sup>177</sup> Such ideas seem to resonate with the transnational counter-hegemonic food sovereignty discourse where land is seen as a necessary

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<sup>172</sup> Keith Barney, "Re-Encountering Resistance: Plantation Activism and Smallholder Production in Thailand and Sarawak, Malaysia," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 45, no. 3 (2004), 331.

<sup>173</sup> Samranjit (2011); Prayong Doklamyai, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai; Land Reform Network, *CLTDs - We Can: A Handbook* (Bangkok: Land Reform Network, 2012). (in Thai)

<sup>174</sup> Prayong Doklamyai quoted in Rakyutitham (2008), 250-251.

<sup>175</sup> Rakyutitham et al. (2005), 177.

<sup>176</sup> Prayong Doklamyai quoted in Rakyutitham (2008), 250-251.

<sup>177</sup> Wacharin Ouprajong, LRM member from Baan Huafai, Chiang Mai, interviewed Nonthaburi, 30 September 2012.

foundation for creating a just food system,<sup>178</sup> as well as with ideas of many sustainable agriculture groups in Thailand.

Many sustainable farmers and NGO activists interviewed suggest that farmers' control over land is crucial to the development of sustainable agriculture.<sup>179</sup> Farmers who tend to switch their production methods to sustainable agriculture tend to have their own land.<sup>180</sup> Without their own land, they find it difficult to, for example, develop small-scale water sources and to develop farm areas that are suitable for agro-ecological production.<sup>181</sup> A study suggests that organic jasmine rice production in Surin province can have pro-poor effects under some conditions. For example, it was noted that producers surveyed had average holding of land between 12.5 and 36.8 rai, as well as access to good quality rice seeds.<sup>182</sup> Aside from practical matters, some sustainable farmers also see farmers' right to land as a core of sustainable agriculture, calling it "soul of sustainable agriculture" where employment in large-scale (even organic) plantations would reduce farmers to workers in factories<sup>183</sup> rather than allowing them to be their own bosses.<sup>184</sup> It is also suggested

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<sup>178</sup> Edelman et al. (2014), 922.

<sup>179</sup> For example: Chomchuan Boonrahong, lecturer at Mae-Jo University, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai; Witoon Lienchamroon, BioThai Foundation, interviewed 5 April 2012, Nonthaburi; Pat Apaimul from Mae-ta, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>180</sup> Kiatsak Chatdee, Co-ordinator at the Institute for a Sustainable Agriculture Community (ISAC), interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai, and Aarat Sang-ubol, Co-ordinator at the Community of Agro-ecology Foundation, interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>181</sup> Lienchamroon and Yaimuang (2011), 298-299. Landlords usually do not allow tenants to dig a pond because land value will drop.

<sup>182</sup> Manus Losirikul and Prasit Karnchan, *The Possibility of Hom Mali Rice Production in Organic Farming Systems as an Alternative Farming Career with Poverty Alleviation Potential for Lower-Northeastern Farmers: A Case of Surin province* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2006). (in Thai)

<sup>183</sup> Nanta Haitook, President of Baan Tanon Organic Herb and Vegetable Processing Group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>184</sup> Pat Apaimul, sustainable farmer in Mae-ta, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

that diversified agricultural production help to encourage farmers not to look at land as mere commodities.<sup>185</sup>

Some LRM members also suggest that the Abhisit government's support of CLTD in 2011 was based on the condition that CLTD projects should implement environmentally-friendly agricultural practices.<sup>186</sup> This is perhaps another reason why some LRM members became interested in sustainable agriculture. As section 3.2 discusses, some members of CLTD projects have received trainings in sustainable agricultural methods. The LRM is also working with sustainable agriculture groups, such as with Dr. Chomchuan Boonrahong and the Institute for a Sustainable Agriculture Community (ISAC), to develop governance mechanisms to ensure fair contract farming arrangements<sup>187</sup> as well as to promote sustainable agriculture and fair markets in CLTD projects.<sup>188</sup> Nevertheless, people and groups in the LRM are not as equally committed ideologically, and leaders in the movement have come to recognise that it is not easy to convince other people in the movement to change their production methods to sustainable agriculture.<sup>189</sup> As chapter 5 discussed, sustainable agriculture requires a lot of knowledge, time and labour, which means it is often not the first choice for CLTD members. Understandably, it is more risky for poorer farmers to enter organic markets because yield tends to drop during the first few years. Instead, poorer farmers who cannot afford the risks usually rely on conventional agricultural methods, which are less labour intensive, to free up their time for low or semi-skilled labour jobs in and outside of the

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<sup>185</sup> Kanoksak Duangkaewruan, Chief Executive of the Subdistrict Administrative Organisation (SAO) from Tambol Mae-ta, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>186</sup> Boonlue Jaroenmee, Klongyong Co-operative leader, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom.

<sup>187</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>188</sup> Chomchuan Boonrahong, lecturer at Mae-Jo University, interviewed 3 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>189</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, quoted in Rakyutitham (2008), 250-251.



agricultural sector.<sup>190</sup> The problems with the promotion of sustainable agriculture in CLTD projects are discussed in greater detail in section 3.2.

### ***3.2) Sustainable agricultural production-distribution in CLTD projects***

Some members of a few CLTD projects have started to engage with sustainable agriculture. A rather special case is Mae-ta community (discussed in chapter 5) which is an important sustainable agriculture group, as well as the only CLTD project where the Subdistrict Administrative Organisation (SAO) supports the management of over 1,200 plots of land in the form of CLTD and also tries to establish a land bank.<sup>191</sup> Nevertheless, Mae-ta is an exceptional case because it had experimented with sustainable agriculture for decades before the adoption of CLTD land governance approach. Generally, progress in the development of sustainable agricultural production in CLTD projects is rather limited. The following paragraphs use examples of CLTD projects from different regions of the country to suggest that difficulties include insufficient land as well as the lack of labour and time to learn about sustainable agriculture. In addition, this section discusses some problems facing CLTD members, such as the lack of bargaining power compare to middlemen, which reflect structural problems of the hegemonic agri-food system discussed in chapter 3.

In the North, land allocated to each member in CLTD projects tend to be rather small. Many CLTD members tend to have debts and were accustomed to being landless labourers. Hence, they prefer to rely on informal jobs and grow whatever they are used to in conventional production methods which do not require

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<sup>190</sup> Sajin Prachason et al., *Market Options of Farmers: Structural Effects on Unfairness and Benefit Distribution* (Bangkok: BioThai and the Social Research Foundation, Chulalongkorn University, 2012), 148. (in Thai)

<sup>191</sup> Kanoksak Duangkaewruen, Mae-ta, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

much of their presence on the farm.<sup>192</sup> The need to earn quick cash from mono-crops to pay off debts also reduces CLTD members' bargaining power in the market.<sup>193</sup> Nevertheless, this does not mean that gaining access to these land made no significant improvement on the material well-being of members. In Baan Pae-tai, for example, members received just a bit over 1 rai of land each and most members manage to earn between 50,000 to 60,000 baht net income per year from sales of longans while some people manage to earn up to 100,000 baht per year, whereas previously they had no other source of income.<sup>194</sup> Despite economic benefits, interviewees convey similar stories of having to rely on both agriculture and off-farm employment because mono-crops do not yield produce all year round so they need other sources of income.<sup>195</sup> However, some people who have reached a certain age tend to rely completely on their CLTD land plots.<sup>196</sup>

There are some Raidong and Mae-aow members who are interested in sustainable agriculture. With the support of one of the community's leaders, Ms. Sangwal Kantham, some members (around 33) received training in organic agriculture methods from the sustainable agriculture network in the North.<sup>197</sup> In addition, some members experiment with growing organic potatoes in common land and to produce organic fertilisers, although they still lack equipments and require additional help from the local administration.<sup>198</sup> A LRM member of another CLTD project from Chiang Mai also reflects on the lack of support from local

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<sup>192</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>193</sup> Mr. Sukaew Fungfoo, President of the Baan Pae-tai CLTD project, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Mr. Oonjai Akaruan and Mr. Rangsan Sansongkwae, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>196</sup> Mr. Jai Kiti, Mae-aow member, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>197</sup> Ms. Sangwal Kantham (local leader from Mae-aow), Mr. Nop Mangkornmai (Raidong member), Mr. Oonjai Akaruen (Mae-aow member), interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>198</sup> Interviews with Rangsan Sansongkwae, Nop Mangkornmai, and Jai Kiti, as well as Sarawut Wongnikorn (Northern Peasants Federation activist), interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun and Chiang Mai.

administration, even though a lot of locals were interested to learn about alternative agriculture.<sup>199</sup>

Members of Baan Pong CLTD project grow Cha-om (climbing wattle) as well as mangoes, longans, and other vegetables. It has been estimated that each household receives an average income of 30,000 baht per year from the sales of their produce (the highest revenue was 60,000 baht per year in 2007).<sup>200</sup> Both male and female members between the age of 18 and 30 tend to work in factories to earn additional income<sup>201</sup> but some members, such as Mrs. Lom Panyathip, rely completely on her farm. Her rationale is that when she was a low-skilled labourer, income was irregular and unstable. Agricultural production on her own farm, on the other hand, makes her feel more independent and also allows her to save up some money.<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, interviews of members in December 2012 suggest that monopoly power of middlemen has reduced prices that farmers received quite significantly.<sup>203</sup> Most members still rely on conventional practices but a few households have tried to switch their production methods to sustainable agriculture.<sup>204</sup> Problems that they experience include the lack of time and labour (especially that they often have to mobilise politically to lobby the state on land issues) to fully engage in what is described as "sophisticated and delicate" agricultural production.<sup>205</sup> As a compromising measure, Baan Pong promotes safe

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<sup>199</sup> Rachata Rangisiri, LRM member from Tambol Mae-faeg, Chiang Mai, interviewed during the demonstration in front of Government House, 1 October 2012, Bangkok.

<sup>200</sup> Singsootham (2010), 43. The study was not clear on whether it was a net income.

<sup>201</sup> Samranjit et al. (2012), 217.

<sup>202</sup> Interviewed 20 May 2009, quoted in Singsootham (2010), 46.

<sup>203</sup> Direk Kong-ngern, Baan Pong, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>204</sup> Singsootham (2010), 49.

<sup>205</sup> Direk Kong-ngern, Baan Pong, interviewed 30 September 2012, Nonthaburi.

usage of agricultural chemicals alongside restrictions on industrial animal farming which produces a lot of environmental externalities.<sup>206</sup>

A few CLTD groups in other regions also attempt to develop sustainable agriculture in their own ways. In the Northeast, perhaps as a reaction to negative environmental consequences of eucalyptus plantations, Samsiew CLTD project puts a lot of emphasis on the development of sustainable agriculture. For example, Mr. Sawai Kamyoi, President of Samsiew, hopes to promote food sovereignty and self-reliance<sup>207</sup> while clause six in Samsaew's charter states that the community advocates sustainable agriculture as well as the promotion of integrated farming and diversity of agri-food products.<sup>208</sup> There are also some exchanges of ideas and knowledge with sustainable agriculture groups. Nevertheless, members' interest in general is rather limited.<sup>209</sup> In the South, some households in Bantad Mountain group are interested in sustainable agriculture such as organic farming and/or diversified farming.<sup>210</sup> One famous sustainable farmer include Mr. Kimpong Sangwongkittiwuth from Tapkhua-plakmoo community, who developed a type of diversified farm consisting of rubber trees, food crops and herbal medicinal plants, which is what he calls a practice of "food sovereignty in a rubber forest" or "four-level agriculture".<sup>211</sup> In the case of Klongyong, there is an attempt to encourage households to grow small plots of organic or pesticide-free vegetables because Klongyong leaders felt it is a more effective strategy than asking members to stop

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<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> Quoted on 9 February 2010, in Singsootham (2010), 78.

<sup>208</sup> Singsootham (2010), 77.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>210</sup> Singsootham (2010), 64; Pachoen Choosang and Long Pechsood, Bantad Mountain group, Trang province, 1 October 2012, Bangkok; Mrs. Nerm Nooboon, LRM member of Baan Saikling and Baan Tachang group, Patlung, interviewed during the demonstration in front of Government House, 1 October 2012, Bangkok.

<sup>211</sup> Singsootham (2010), 65 and Kongkaew (2011), 115.

using chemicals completely.<sup>212</sup> Currently around 50 out of 240 households started to experiment with sustainable production.<sup>213</sup> Taking advantage of its close proximity to Bangkok, Klongyong members sell their organic/pesticide-free products in many green markets (such as in universities) in Bangkok.<sup>214</sup>

### ***3.3) ALRO and sustainable agri-food production-distribution***

ALRO's mandate includes supporting agricultural production of small-scale farmers in areas under its jurisdiction. A qualitative research of 43 ALRO farms in 4 provinces found that sustainable agricultural methods have lesser economic risks and yield higher income as well as food security compare to conventional cash-crop agricultural production.<sup>215</sup> Dr. Weerachai Narkwibulwong, Secretary General of ALRO, expresses clearly his view that "organic or pesticide-free agriculture is the only way [for small-scale farmers] to survive" and that "it is not even an alternative."<sup>216</sup> To achieve this vision, ALRO focuses on building model projects in a few places, such as the establishment of Kammad Sustainable Agriculture group (discussed in chapter 5), and qualitative expansions of such projects.<sup>217</sup> It also promotes Good Agricultural Practice (GAP), safe usage of pesticides to reduce production costs and improve health of farmers, and tries to act as a connection hub for farmers and agro-processing industries.<sup>218</sup> Another ideological influence that affects ALRO's work is the King's sufficiency economy philosophy, where sufficiency economy implies building immunity and self-reliance to reduce risks

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<sup>212</sup> Boonlue Jaroenmee, Klongyong Co-operative, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom.

<sup>213</sup> Shoti Saiyuenyong, Klongyong Co-operative, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom.

<sup>214</sup> Wantana Iamsuwan, Klongyong Co-operative, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom.

<sup>215</sup> Weerachai Narkwibulwong, Arpapan Pattanapan, and Arthita Pongprom, *Efficient Usage of ALRO Land: A Case Study of Maximum of 10 Rai per Household Land Plot* (Bangkok: Thailand Research Fund, 2011), abstract and 147. (in Thai)

<sup>216</sup> Weerachai Narkwibulwong, Secretary General of ALRO, interviewed 14 February 2013, Bangkok.

<sup>217</sup> Narkwibulwong (2012), 20.

<sup>218</sup> Weerachai Narkwibulwong, interviewed 14 February 2013, Bangkok.

from crises but does not imply isolation from society.<sup>219</sup> ALRO tries to translate this idea to policies such as by encouraging farmers to form supportive networks which would also promote learning. ALRO also works with local leaders and sustainable agriculture groups such as Inpang in the Northeast to spread useful production knowledge.<sup>220</sup>

As discussed in previous chapters, there can be conservative interpretations and top-down implementations of sufficiency ideas by the Thai bureaucracy which tend to alienate some civil society groups from working with the bureaucracy. Although more empirical research is needed to evaluate ALRO's promotion of sustainable agriculture and its working relations with other groups in society, it seems that top-level management ideas and policy directions of ALRO in early 2010s are (at least partially) compatible with those of the LRM and many sustainable agriculture groups. This suggests that further collaborations should not be ruled out as collaborations do not necessarily imply co-optation of oppositions. The next part of the chapter discusses the possibility of co-optation of oppositions in greater detail.

#### **Part 4: Current obstacles and the possibility of co-optation of oppositions**

This part of the chapter explores current obstacles facing the LRM as well as the possibility of co-optation of oppositions, given the global context and contemporary Thai politics. Section 4.1 discusses problems of violence and legal persecutions facing the LRM, as well as how the Community Forest law serves as a reminder to be careful of future co-optation of CLTD law. The following section 4.2 discusses how some narrow framings of the red-yellow political polarisation in Thailand

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<sup>219</sup> Narkwibulwong (2012), 17 and 20.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid*, 19 and 21.

weaken the LRM and people's movements, as well as open room for co-optation of oppositions. This section also discusses how some analytical discourses, such as those which frame development options as either conservative or modern, can potentially be problematic. Section 4.3 then evaluates the LRM's attempts to link up with transnational movements and possible benefits from engaging with counter-hegemonic struggles at the global level.

#### ***4.1) Violence, the law, and co-optation of oppositions***

Land occupations sparked violent retaliations in many places. On 13 April 2002, the first Thaksin Shinawatra administration promised to help LRM protesters which were occupying Chiang Mai city hall. However, a cabinet order on 23 April 2002 urged relevant authorities to strictly enforce the law on land occupiers, which led to increased number of people being arrested.<sup>221</sup> Often, excessive force was used during arrests.<sup>222</sup> In Lamphun, local village headmen were mobilised to resist land occupiers such as by accusing them of being communists and violators of tradition and Buddhist morality.<sup>223</sup> Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, on the other hand, described NGOs which joined the protest against the cabinet order as "crazy" organisations on national television on 30 July 2002.<sup>224</sup> To destroy their legitimacy, he claimed that the NGOs create work for themselves to attract foreign funding.<sup>225</sup> At times, it is difficult to locate the sources of violent retaliations. In the North, there was an attempt assassination of Mr. Wacharin Ouprajong on 16 June 2002, and an

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<sup>221</sup> Samnuanyen (2006), 98-101.

<sup>222</sup> For example, 200 policemen and dogs were used to arrest Sukaew Fungfoo and seven other villagers. In another case, 400 policemen destroyed crops and huts in Baan Pongroo and other communities. *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>224</sup> Somkiat Phongpaibul (2003), quoted in in Samnuanyen (2006), 101. (full reference was not given)

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*.

assassination of Mr. Kaew Pinpanma on 23 June 2002.<sup>226</sup> In Suratthani in the South, violent retaliations against the land reform movement in December 2003 caused the movement to disperse into smaller groups that acted independently. In 2007, 3,000 people occupied 1,600 rai of palm plantation operated by Thaksin palm company in Ampur Kiriratnikhom, but were then violently dispersed by combined police, soldiers and volunteer forces which led to two deaths.<sup>227</sup> During the research period of this thesis, two female members of the Southern Federation of Farmers from Klongsaipattana community were assassinated by M16 war gun(s) in December 2012.<sup>228</sup>

As part 2 has discussed, the Abhisit government gave some support to CLTD ideas and practice, but it can be argued that the government could have done more, such as by passing a CLTD or local natural resource management law. Moreover, the government did not seem interested to re-distribute private land<sup>229</sup> and legal persecutions of LRM members continued. Between 2007 and 2008, there were 9,336 cases of people trespassing to use land in forest areas<sup>230</sup> and in 2011, there were over 800 legal cases relating to land conflicts known to the LRM where around 300 to 400 of these cases directly involve LRM members.<sup>231</sup> By 2012, around 20 people involved in land conflicts in the LRM network were in prison.<sup>232</sup> Even if the Thai

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<sup>226</sup> Samnuanyen (2006), 102 and Wacharin Ouprajong, LRM farmer from Baan Huafai, Chiang Mai, interviewed Nonthaburi, 30 September 2012.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, 108-113.

<sup>228</sup> Prachathai News, "P-move Asks Supreme Court to Stop the Delay of the Enforcement of the Ruling on the Palm Oil Land Conflict in Suratthani, as the Delay has Led to Violence," December 25, 2012. (in Thai)

<sup>229</sup> Singsootham (2010), 26-27.

<sup>230</sup> Dr. Duangmanee Laowakul, Faculty of Economics, Thammasart University, research presentation at the Food Security Assembly 2014 in Thailand, quoted in "Macro View of Land," *Isra News*, July 14, 2014.

<sup>231</sup> Dr. Permsak Mekarapirom, quoted during the discussion panel on land problems at the second National Reform Assembly, 2012, Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>232</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai. A table of legal land conflicts in Thailand as relating to different government policies (5 regions, 638 cases) can be found at Kraiyoowong et al. (2005), 21.



government attempts to introduce a CLTD law, the case of the Community Forest law suggests that extreme caution and serious scrutiny are needed to prevent co-optation. After many years of campaign by civil society, the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) proposed its own version of the Community Forest law where local farmers are allowed to grow tree plantations in forest areas under the supervision of RFD,<sup>233</sup> which can clearly be seen as co-optation of oppositions. There were attempts to revise the law by civil society groups but after the law was passed in 2007, civil society groups decided to reject it because it does not reflect the spirit of participatory local management of resource.<sup>234</sup> In 2010, the Thai Constitutional Court ruled that the process of passing this law was not legitimate so the law was dropped, and in mid 2015 (at the time of writing) there is a new attempt to introduce a Community Forest law by the National Reform Assembly, which was established by the military government.<sup>235</sup>

Another potentially problematic issue is how CLTD projects ought to be registered as co-operatives. Some Raidong/Mae-aow members suggest that they had to register as a co-operative to receive CLTD certified by the Office of the Prime Minister. However, existing co-operative law allows the bureaucracy to inspect financial accounts of co-operatives, which gives power to the bureaucracy to pressure co-operatives to engage in commercial activities (such as to sell agricultural inputs) or to give out loans so that there are "some movements in the account" or the

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<sup>233</sup> Naruemon Thabchumpon, "NGOs and Grassroots Participation in the Political Reform Process," in *Reforming Thai Politics*, ed. Duncan McCargo (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2002), 197-198.

<sup>234</sup> "Community Forest Network Rejects the Community Forest Bill," n.d., <<http://www.codi.or.th/index.php/news/documentary-communities-news/42-2009-09-22-05-47-57/848-2010-09-06-06-01-33>>, received 27 November 2014

<sup>235</sup> iLaw website, "Third Attempt At Drafting Community Forest Law by the National Reform Assembly Is Still Not Relevant to Communities," July 23, 2015, <<http://www.ilaw.or.th/node/3728>>, retrieved 10 July 2015. (in Thai)

co-operatives will be cancelled.<sup>236</sup> However, such suggestions create tensions because Raidong/Mae-aow leaders saw such proposed activities as promotions of conventional agricultural production, and encouragements for individual members to accumulate debt. Instead, Raidong/Mae-aow leaders want to help members to reduce their costs of production, such as by producing and promoting the use of organic fertilisers.<sup>237</sup> This issue suggests that perhaps there is also a need to rethink and reform laws governing co-operatives in Thailand.

#### ***4.2) The red-yellow divide, discourse, and co-optation of oppositions***

Chapter 4 already suggested that political polarisation or the red-yellow divide in Thailand weakens social movements. Some academics and activists in the LRM also voice this issue in interviews.<sup>238</sup> After the coup de'tat which ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006, there was "a blank" in terms of social movement mobilisation because NGOs were divided on strategies, such as whether to establish dialogues with the military-established government.<sup>239</sup> Similarly, after the coup de'tat in 2014 which ousted Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, people's movements were also rather divided. Some groups oppose the coup de'tat through symbolic actions while some groups want to use government mechanisms, such as the National Reform Assembly, to push through their reform agenda. Others prefer grass-root mobilisation which includes building the people's forum for reform and

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<sup>236</sup> Sangwal Kantham, Baan Mae-aow, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>237</sup> Rangsan Sansongkwae and Sangwal Kantham, Baan Raidong/Mae-aow, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

<sup>238</sup> For example: Anan Ganjanapan, Chiang Mai university, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai and Prapart Pintoptang, Chulalongkorn University, interviewed 16 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>239</sup> Sawitta Teeronwattanakul, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

civil society's campaign for a new Constitution that supports participatory democracy.<sup>240</sup>

Differences in opinions which divide people's movements into factions partly stem from narrow framings of the political situation based on the red-yellow divide, which seem to benefit elites rather than the general population. As previous chapters have discussed, the red shirts portray their movement as being representative of the class of poor marginalised peasants who are opposing the elites.<sup>241</sup> However, such claim is problematic because the red shirts movement benefits Thaksin Shinnawatra who is "one of Thailand's greatest capitalist."<sup>242</sup> Moreover, Thai "peasants" are more diverse and politically divided than what is being suggested by the red shirts movement.<sup>243</sup> Interviews of LRM members in Chiang Mai, supposedly the stronghold of the Shinnawatra family, and interviews of LRM members in other parts of the country also suggest that there is a mixed of political ideologies among members of CLTD projects.<sup>244</sup>

Those who are supposedly elitists (those who oppose Phua Thai) often do support reform measures that would benefit marginalised people including land reforms. As previously discussed, the Democrat party gave some support to CLTD and the LRM, while the National Reform Committee led by Prawase Wasi, often

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<sup>240</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, interviewed by Pechra Buranin, "Four Laws for the Poor Campaign," 10 October 2014, <<http://4laws.info/2014/10/10/603/>>. (in Thai)

<sup>241</sup> For "class-based" approach to the analysis of contemporary Thai politics, see for example, Giles J. Ungpakorn, "Class Struggle between the Coloured T-Shirts in Thailand," *Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009): 76–100, and also Kittiarasa (2011), Elinoff (2012), Hewison (2012), Sopranzetti (2012), quoted in Nishizaki (2014), 2.

<sup>242</sup> Tim Forsyth, "Thailand's Red Shirt Protests: Popular Movement or Dangerous Street Theatre?," *Social Movement Studies* 9, no. 4 (November 2010), 466.

<sup>243</sup> For example, see Yoshinori Nishizaki, "Peasants and the Redshirt Movement in Thailand: Some Dissenting Voices," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 41, no. 1 (January 30, 2014): 1–28.

<sup>244</sup> Direk Kong-ngern and Montri Bualoi, interviewed 31 October 2012, as well as others eg. Sawitta Teeronwattanakul, 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

portrayed as "ammart" by red shirt supporters,<sup>245</sup> helped provide forums and support for social movements such as the LRM. After the 2014 coup, many individuals and civil society groups try to work with the military government to push through genuine reform measures to benefit the population, which suggests that they cannot neatly be placed in the "ammart" box. To a certain extent, hard-core red and yellow (anti-Thaksin) shirts have more in common than they might realise. On the one hand, there are some anti-Thaksin people who refuse to criticise some of the military government's policies even though these policies cause damage to marginalised population not too dissimilar to Phua Thai party's policies. On the other hand, in a similar manner, many red shirts refrain from criticising Phua Thai and the Shinnawatra. Overall, these examples suggest that reality is more complicated than what the "Phrai vs. ammart" class struggle discourse suggests. One should question such framing of Thai politics as well as analyses which either portray the red shirts or anti-red shirts movements in a heroic light.

Discourse which portrays the red shirts as "the real" people's movement represented by Phua Thai political party tends to infer that other movements are small and insignificant by comparison.<sup>246</sup> It can also obscure political-economic problems of the capitalist system and crowd out other movements. It has been suggested that the red shirts movement tends to concentrate on promoting abstract democracy issues rather than material/basic need issues, while relying mainly on individual rights and elections for policy support from Thai Rak Thai and Phua Thai governments.<sup>247</sup> Policies which focus on establishing state patronage of individuals, however, can turn out to be a form of co-optation of oppositions. As suggested by a

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<sup>245</sup> Prapart Pintoptang, Chulalongkorn University, interviewed 16 October 2012, Nonthaburi.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> Anan Ganjanapan, Chiang Mai University, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

leading LRM activist, some of Thaksin government's poverty reduction policies, such as the registering of poor people's names in 2004 to receive future help from the state, fostered the people's reliance on the government as individuals. While such policies achieved little in the end, they hindered the LRM's network building and collective mobilisation.<sup>248</sup>

As previous chapters discussed, analytical frameworks which offer only two main development options - conservative or modern - can help to preserve the capitalist hegemonic status quo. Some women movements in Africa, for example, oppose customary tenure of communal land ownership because of its patriarchalism, but instead of finding other alternatives, they embrace a neo-liberal land privatisation programme despite its dispossession effects.<sup>249</sup> The danger of such mental trap is also present in Thailand. Community rights are viewed skeptically by the red shirts as conservative discourse and practice advocate by those who like to support military governments.<sup>250</sup> However, as this chapter has discussed, CLTD is a recently constructed local land governance mechanism based on democratic principles. Advocacy of community rights can be seen as a form of "strategic essentialism" - a term coined by G. C. Spivak to suggest how it can be advantageous for a group of people to temporarily essentialise their identity to achieve certain agenda.<sup>251</sup>

Another potentially problematic type of discourse is one that tends to place smallholders' attempts to secure access to land on the same plane as larger and more powerful actors, such as national states and capital groups. Hall, Hirsch and Li (2011), for example, tries to draw attention to the fact that smallholders can also be

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<sup>248</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>249</sup> Silvia Federici, "Women, Land Struggles, and the Reconstruction of the Commons," *Working USA: The Journal of Labor and Society* 14 (2011), 42 and 48.

<sup>250</sup> Anan Ganjanapan, Chiang Mai University, interviewed 29 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*

agents of enclosure and dispossession, such as through the discourse of common property,<sup>252</sup> although it does not discuss the contemporary LRM in Thailand directly. What the book does not make sufficiently clear of, however, is that the power of agents to enclose land and dispossess others are massively different, not to mention that *why* and *how* different actors want to secure their access to land are qualitatively different, especially from perspectives of ecological sustainability, social justice, and human or farmer rights. Whereas corporations may engage in land grabs for speculation purposes, or to grow agro-fuel inputs to feed mostly the demands of the world's wealthier population, some less powerful agents need access to land just to meet their basic needs. De Schutter (2011), for example, discusses the opportunity costs of large-scale land grabs which have less poverty-reducing impact than if access to land and water were improved for local farming communities.<sup>253</sup> Omitting to address differences in power relations help to reduce the legitimacy of civil society groups that engage in community-based resource management, which has political implication that favours the maintenance of the hegemonic status quo.

#### ***4.3) The global dimension of land governance and the Thai LRM***

Discussions on land conflicts in this chapter, such as in Chiang Mai and Lamphun, tend to focus on the roles of domestic actors such as land occupiers, the Thai state and landlords. However, it is important not to forget that the current land governance structures in Thailand can be seen as part of the global hegemonic land governance structures, maintained by global institutions and actors such as the World Bank. In addition, as chapter 3 discussed, foreign land grabs can also manifest through domestic nominees in Thailand. In this sense, the LRM's national campaign to

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<sup>252</sup> Hall, Hirsch and Li (2011), 13-14.

<sup>253</sup> De Schutter (2011), 249 and 256.

promote local governance and more equal distribution of land is relevant to and can be seen as part of the global counter-hegemonic forces which try to challenge the hegemonic global land governance system. The following paragraphs first discuss contemporary debates on the benefits and difficulties of connecting local, national and international or transnational social movements. Relationships between the Thai LRM and La Vía Campesina are then explored. There are some limitations in linking up with transnational movements and the LRM tends to concentrate on local and national struggles. In the future, the LRM could perhaps engage more with global counter-hegemonic initiatives such as the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land and Other Natural Resources.

Some studies suggest that land contests are becoming globalised and are taking place in multi-scale terrains of multiple actors, institutions and frameworks.<sup>254</sup> It has been suggested that the informal complex of transnational land governance can be used to protect vulnerable populations subjected to illegal and violent dispossessions of their land.<sup>255</sup> However, it is not a simple task to orchestrate through the transnational governance network. Rural social movements can justify global engagement only if it generates support for local struggles and open up national political space,<sup>256</sup> but there can be many problems trying to link up with transnational social movements such as with regards to representation and accountability.<sup>257</sup> A few national agrarian groups might be able to link up with

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<sup>254</sup> For example, Margulis, McKeon, Borras (2013), 13.

<sup>255</sup> Matias E. Margulis and Tony Porter, "Governing the Global Land Grab: Multipolarity, Ideas, and Complexity in Transnational Governance," *Global Restructuring, State, Capital and Labour. Contesting Neo-Gramscian Perspectives* 10, no. 1 (2013), 66 and also 68-69.

<sup>256</sup> Nora McKeon, "'One Does Not Sell the Land Upon Which the People Walk': Land Grabbing, Transnational Rural Social Movements, and Global Governance," *Globalizations* 10, no. 1 (2013), 117.

<sup>257</sup> Saturnino M. Borras, Marc Edelman, and Cristóbal Kay, "Transnational Agrarian Movements: Origins and Politics, Campaigns and Impact," in *Transnational Agrarian Movements Confronting*

transnational movements while other groups are left behind.<sup>258</sup> In addition, transnational agrarian movements tend to look for counterparts in their "image and likeness" so if they found nothing of the sort in other countries and regions, they tend to assume the absence of movements or that there are weak movements.<sup>259</sup> Within a transnational agrarian movement, some groups also have more resources and influence than others.<sup>260</sup>

One of the biggest and most critical transnational agrarian social movement is La Vía Campesina, which currently represents more than 150 (sub)national rural social movement organizations from 56 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, (Western) Europe, Asia and Africa.<sup>261</sup> It tries to connect local, national and international groups and involve their members through the "externalisation" of national-local issues or the vertical projection of domestic claims onto international institutions or foreign actors.<sup>262</sup> Issues in countries important to La Vía Campesina tend to be swiftly externalised,<sup>263</sup> but there is still room for improvement. For example, the "gate keeper" problem where one national organisation relegates other movements to the margin, such as with the case of India and Indonesia,<sup>264</sup> can hinder the representation claim of La Vía Campesina. In addition, La Vía Campesina has no presence in some countries such as China even

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*Globalization*, ed. Saturnino M. Borras, Marc Edelman, and Cristóbal Kay (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 11.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>260</sup> Saturnino M. Borras, "La Vía Campesina and Its Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform," in *Transnational Agrarian Movements Confronting Globalization*, ed. Saturnino M. Borras, Marc Edelman, and Cristóbal Kay (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 105-106.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

<sup>262</sup> The definition of "externalisation" was from S. Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 32, quoted in Borras (2008), 97.

<sup>263</sup> Borras (2008), 95-97.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid*, 111-112 and Nancy Lee Peluso, Suraya Afiff, and Noer Fauzi Rachman, "Claiming the Grounds for Reform: Agrarian and Environmental Movements in Indonesia," in *Transnational Agrarian Movements Confronting Globalization*, ed. Saturnino M. Borras, Marc Edelman, and Cristóbal Kay (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 224.



though Chinese peasants and the rural dispossessed have forged collective identities that potentially provide a basis for conceptualising alternatives to neo-liberal capitalism.<sup>265</sup> Overall, it has been suggested that La Vía Campesina needs to address the diversity of land issues beyond the ones that their main members are concerned with.<sup>266</sup>

In the case of Thailand, the Assembly of the Poor and the Northern Peasants Federation (an important member of the LRM) are members of La Vía Campesina. These organisations also help to connect Vía Campesina with other civil society groups in Thailand, such as the Alternative Agriculture Network (AAN) in the Northeast. As part 1 has discussed, many local leaders in CLTD projects visited movements in other countries such as Brazil and Philippines, as well as joined La Vía Campesina's international conferences such as the one in Mali in 2011.<sup>267</sup> The statement of the Global Alliance Against Land Grabbing, convened by La Vía Campesina and allies in Mali in November 2011, extends the understanding of land governance beyond Western private property ideas to include communal and community property regimes.<sup>268</sup> Such an instance would seem to suggest that through La Vía Campesina, the LRM can make its voice heard at the global level. Nevertheless, there are still some current obstacles. While the Thai representatives learned about food sovereignty and that land grab is a global phenomenon, they had language barrier problems and could not fully share their ideas such as with regards

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<sup>265</sup> Kathy Le Mons Walker, "From Covert to Overt: Everyday Peasant Politics in China and the Implications for Transnational Agrarian Movements," in *Transnational Agrarian Movements Confronting Globalization* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 311 and 315-316.

<sup>266</sup> Borras (2008), 113-114.

<sup>267</sup> Direk Kong-ngern, interviewed 30 September 2012, Nonthaburi and 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>268</sup> Borras, Franco and Wang (2013), 171.

to CLTD.<sup>269</sup> In addition, a leading activist from the Northern Peasants Federation comments that La Vía Campesina often focuses on what he perceives to be rather abstract issues but when policy issues are discussed, the Thai counterparts are often more or less asked to disseminate information in top-down manners. Aside from international conferences and joint declarations every now and then, there is still a gap in co-ordination between the Thai movement and La Vía Campesina.<sup>270</sup> Thai LRM (and sustainable agriculture movement) members could also be encouraged to participate more in international exchanges of ideas and other forms of collaborations. For example, there was a small-scale farmer conference organised by La Vía Campesina and the Thai Community Agroecology Foundation in Surin in November 2012, but a lot of Surin sustainable farmers interviewed for this thesis suggest that many farmers in their network did not attend the conference.<sup>271</sup>

The discussion on existing problems in this section does not mean to demoralise people in the LRM and La Vía Campesina, but to identify room for improvement and to strengthen the movements. More research is needed, but a question should also be raised whether the red-yellow divide in Thailand does/will act as a form of "gate keeper" problem in Thailand. As previously discussed, class-based approach to the analysis of Thai politics, where the red shirts are presented as true representatives of the peasants and the marginalised, is problematic and needs to be questioned. Uncritical adoption of such an analytical approach can constrain strategy options, potential alliances, and overall effectiveness of social movements. Some groups which appear "yellow" (or have middle/upperclass origins) might be excluded even though they have counter-hegemonic agenda. This will be a loss

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<sup>269</sup> Arat Sang-ubol, AAN activist, interviewed 19 December 2012 in Surin. Also Direk Kong-ngern and Montri Bua-loi from Baan Pong, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>270</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>271</sup> For example, farmers from Tamor and Ta-toom groups in Surin, previously discussed in chapter 5.

because, as previously discussed, the LRM (as well as the sustainable agriculture movement) benefits from cross-class alliances.

Aside from collaborations with transnational agrarian movements, the Thai LRM could also benefit from engaging with global counter-hegemonic initiatives to challenge hegemonic land governance as well as to stay ahead of global co-optation trends. At the global level, the food, energy and climate crises narrative can be used to justify large-scale land investments,<sup>272</sup> which can be seen as a form of co-optation of oppositions that the LRM should be aware of. The Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment (PRAI) launched by the World Bank, FAO, IFAD, and UNCTAD in January 2010, for example, are criticised for presenting large-scale investments as solutions to rural poverty and hunger.<sup>273</sup> One notable counter-hegemonic response include the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land and Other Natural Resources, negotiated with involvement of rural social movements and formally adopted at a special session of the Committee on World Food Security on 11 May 2012.<sup>274</sup> The Voluntary Guidelines take into account important issues such as the protection of customary tenure, community consultations, and states' obligations to regulate their corporations' operations beyond their borders.<sup>275</sup> The Thai LRM can perhaps use them to aid their national and local campaigns. However, by early 2014 there does not seem to be any discussion about the Voluntary Guidelines nor other transnational initiatives. It is also unclear how international governance instruments such as the Voluntary

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<sup>272</sup> Ben White et al., "The New Enclosures: Critical Perspectives on Corporate Land Deals," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39, no. 3–4 (July 2012), 631.

<sup>273</sup> For example, see Olivier De Schutter, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food presented to the 65th General Assembly of the United Nations (A/65/281): Access to land and the right to food* (New York: United Nations), quoted in McKeon (2013), 110.

<sup>274</sup> McKeon (2013), 110–111.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

Guidelines can translate to national governance structures.<sup>276</sup> Even if supportive laws and policies have been passed, political interactions between different actors will shape their interpretations and implementation.<sup>277</sup> This can open room for co-optation, especially if the Thai LRM and/or other concerned groups in society do not pay sufficient attention to the issue, which would be a waste of an opportunity.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the contemporary Thai land reform movement's counter-hegemonic ideas, as well as its attempts to promote counter-hegemonic land governance structures and agricultural production-distribution practices. The last part of the chapter has also discussed current obstacles and the possibility of co-optation of oppositions facing the LRM. Overall, this chapter helps the thesis to advance six original contributions to knowledge which were outlined in chapter 1, as the following paragraph elaborates.

Similar to the previous chapter, empirical exploration of the LRM in Thailand adds to existing literature on agrarian movements, which is the second contribution to knowledge of this thesis. The discussion on co-optation of oppositions - an essential element of the hegemonic agri-food system which adapts to maintain the status quo - also helps to advance the first original contribution, which is to bring new empirical information from Thailand into existing literature on the corporate agri-food system. In addition, this chapter helps to advance the third contribution to knowledge, which is to extend neo-Marxist and Gramscian theory on the agri-food system, such as by exploring the complementarities of ideas and

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<sup>276</sup> Borras, Franco and Wang (2013), 175 and McKeon (2013), 117.

<sup>277</sup> Jennifer C. Franco, "Peripheral Justice? Rethinking Justice Sector Reform in the Philippines," *World Development* 36, no. 10 (2008): 1858–1873, quoted in Borras, Franco and Wang (2013), 172.

practice in the building of the LRM's counter-hegemonic project e.g. the complexity of rights and CLTD. Using a critical international political economy theoretical perspective to analyse the LRM, on the other hand, helps to advance the fourth contribution to knowledge, which is to provide new perspectives and data on Thai agrarian development and social movements. For example, the LRM's call for CLTD and land reforms are discussed as part of global counter-hegemonic forces (local, national and transnational) which try to find alternatives to the global hegemonic land governance structures. Complementing the discussions in previous chapters, this chapter helps to advance the fifth and sixth contributions to knowledge by providing new perspectives on Thai localism as well as polarised politics in Thailand. For example, this chapter argues that the red-yellow divide weakens the LRM and that the concept of "community" in CLTD projects does not necessarily imply conservative appeal to the past, but a contemporary counter-hegemonic attempt to create a mechanism for local governance of land based on democratic principles.

This chapter has discussed some current and potential problems facing the LRM as of early to mid 2014. However, the research on the LRM uncovered some issues that should be analysed but are beyond the scope of this thesis. More research is needed, but it is possible that uncontested land valuation methods based on market prices can obstruct counter-hegemonic land reform initiatives. It has been noted, for example, that if land banks can be established, they could facilitate a rent-to-buy type of land purchases for co-operatives in CLTD projects.<sup>278</sup> However, if land prices continue to climb, it is unclear how long it will take to complete each purchase. In the case of Klongyong CLTD co-operative, land prices are very high

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<sup>278</sup> Prayong Doklamyai, Northern Peasants Federation, interviewed 1 November 2012, Chiang Mai.

because the location is close to Bangkok. A few Klongyong members have also questioned whether the group can keep to agricultural production when there is increasing pollution from nearby sources, and when it is a lot more profitable to use the land for other purposes.<sup>279</sup> As the next and last chapter of the thesis will discuss, land management and the agri-food system are inevitably related to other sectors of the economy. This suggests that future research should take into account the interconnections between different sectors of the economy to understand the problems more fully and to shed light on the prospects of counter-hegemony.

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<sup>279</sup> Boonlue Jaroenmee, Klongyong Co-operative, interviewed 10 October 2012, Nakhonpratom.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

This concluding chapter recapitulates the thesis' main arguments and contributions to knowledge. It also reflects on the research design and process, as well as on future areas of research. The first part of this chapter restates the central research question and provides a summary of main arguments. The second part reviews six conceptual and empirical original contributions to knowledge of the thesis, and discusses their possible wider implications for knowledge. The third part of this chapter reflects on the theoretical framework, methodology, and research process of the thesis. The last part suggests some future areas of research.

#### **Part 1: Central research question and summary of main arguments**

To answer the central research question – "How have hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces shaped the agri-food system in Thailand (1990 to 2014)?" – this thesis has developed a combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework in chapter 2, which has guided empirical explorations of the dynamics of the Thai and global agri-food system in chapters 3 to 6. Overall, the thesis has advanced four main arguments, as the following paragraphs elaborate.

First, the thesis has argued that the mainstream agri-food system in Thailand has been shaped to aid capital accumulation by domestic and transnational hegemonic forces, and is sustained through the maintenance of hegemonic agri-food production-distribution, governance structures and ideational order. Chapter 3 focuses primarily on advancing this first argument.

The second main argument of the thesis is that, through the Thai sustainable agriculture and land reform movements, counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices, and governance structures have to certain extents managed to influence the agri-food system in Thailand and offer alternatives. Even though the movements mostly operate within local and national boundaries, they can be seen as part of global counter-hegemonic forces in the agri-food system. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 have advanced this second main argument: chapter 4 has reviewed counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand, while chapters 5 and 6 have focused on the sustainable agriculture and land reform movements.

Chapters 4 to 6 have also advanced the third and fourth main arguments of this thesis. The third main argument is that hegemonic forces have many measures to co-opt dissent, alternative and reformist forces into hegemonic structures, which weakens counter-hegemony. Moreover, lines between hegemony and counter-hegemony are not always clear. This is related to the fourth main argument of the thesis, which is that counter-hegemony can be seen as an un-linear ongoing process over a long period of time, where predominantly counter-hegemonic forces may at times retain some hegemonic elements. The threat of co-optation also suggests that counter-hegemonic forces should continually refine and develop clear ideas and practices to guard against co-optation.

## **Part 2: Summary of contributions to knowledge**

Through its study of hegemony and counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand, the thesis makes six main original contributions to knowledge, as the following paragraphs elaborate.



First, the thesis brings new empirical information from Thailand into existing literature on the corporate agri-food system and agrarian political economy. In particular, discussions in chapter 3 have brought new information on issues such as unsustainable industrialised production methods, land grabs, the food-fuel nexus, financial speculations of agri-food commodities, and monopoly power in the context of the agri-food system in Thailand. Chapters 4 to 6 have also contributed new empirical information through their discussions of co-optation of oppositions in the agri-food system. Co-optation of oppositions can be seen as an essential element in the dynamics of the hegemonic agri-food system, as co-optation helps the system to subsume dissent and to maintain the status quo. The paddy pledging scheme, for example, was discussed in chapter 4 as an important co-optive hegemonic agri-food policy in Thailand, even though the Phua Thai government and its supporters portray the policy as counter-hegemonic.

Second, the thesis brings new empirical information from Thailand into existing literature on alternative agri-food and agrarian movements. Chapter 4 has provided an overview of counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand. Chapter 5 has focused on the sustainable agriculture movement and provided empirical information on, for example, sustainable production-distribution practices, producer rice mills in Thailand, as well as linkages between Thai and transnational sustainable agriculture groups. Chapter 6 has focused on the land reform movement and provided empirical information on, for example, ideas and practices of community land title deeds, collaborations with La Vía Campesina, and attempts to pass and implement national land reform laws.

Third, the thesis extends neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical perspectives in the study of the agri-food system. Chapter 2 has provided an outline of the combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework, while chapters 3 to 6 have discussed empirical information through this theoretical lens. Important theoretical concepts utilised include commodification, accumulation by dispossessions, appropriation of surplus, hegemony, counter-hegemony, and co-optation of oppositions, which were adapted in this thesis to suit discussions on the Thai and global agri-food system. On the one hand, such a theoretical framework has enabled the thesis to articulate the symbiosis of ideas and practices in the agri-food system. On the other hand, empirical explorations have suggested that concepts of hegemony, counter-hegemony and co-optation of oppositions are not always clear-cut in practice.

Fourth, the thesis provides new perspectives and recent data on Thai agrarian development and social movements, through discussions in chapters 3 to 6. Chapter 3 has discussed important contemporary issues in the Thai agri-food system and, unlike most mainstream studies, has analysed structural problems in the mainstream Thai agri-food system in terms of inter-related ideational and material structures at local, national, and global scales. Chapter 4 has suggested that the sustainable agriculture and land reform movements can be understood partly as a lineage of past agrarian movements in Thailand, and as part of Thai civil society's search for alternative development paths. Aside from providing up-to-date empirical information, chapters 5 and 6 have also provided new perspectives on Thai agrarian social movements by suggesting the importance of counter-hegemonic ideas, production-distribution practices, as well as governance structures at local, national, and global scales.

Fifth, the thesis provides new perspectives as well as recent data on practices and discourses of Thai localism, through discussions in chapters 4 to 6. Chapter 4 has briefly discussed Thai localism, while chapter 5 has explored discourses and practices of Thai localism in greater detail. Chapter 5 has also indicated how the Thai sustainable agriculture movement is partially inspired by Thai localism, and provides new perspectives on Thai localism. The analysis has rejected a polarised conception of development as having only two options – either a traditional backward localist choice or a modern choice – and argues that Thai localism can be seen as having counter-hegemonic potential, even though there can be some elements that are potentially problematic. Chapter 6 has also elaborated this argument through its discussions of the land reform movement, which was partially inspired by Thai localism.

Sixth, the thesis brings new perspectives on polarised politics in Thailand through discussions in chapters 4 to 6. As discussed in the introduction chapter, existing literature on polarised Thai politics often focuses on issues such as nationalism, the role of Thai monarchy in politics, elections and the nature of democracy in Thailand, or tends to portray polarised politics as a manifestation of class-based struggles. Discussions in chapter 4, however, have given new perspectives and suggest that polarised political discourses can be seen as a form of co-optation of oppositions which affect the agri-food system in Thailand, such as through a narrow framing of problems of the agri-food system. Moreover, polarised political discourses also help to create divisions and weaken social movements. Chapter 6 has substantiated this argument through its exploration of the land reform movement in Thailand, while chapter 5 has suggested that some people are skeptical

of sustainable agriculture groups because of their associations with King Bhumipol's sufficiency ideas and the monarchy's (perceived) role in polarised political conflicts.

Overall, the thesis has made some novel and important contributions to the study of the corporate agri-food system and alternative agri-food movements. Not only does the thesis bring in new empirical information on the corporate agri-food system and alternative social movements from an under-studied area (Thailand), but it also traces local-global linkages of the agri-food system which serves as a reminder not to overly-generalise characteristics of the corporate agri-food system in different parts of the world. For example, the thesis demonstrates that, unlike a stereotypical portrayal of land grabs as large-scale acquisition of land by foreign capital from major developed countries, land grabs can also occur through networks of smaller-scale agents and domestic nominees, or are driven by capital groups from developing countries such as Thailand. In addition, analysing structural problems of the agri-food system in Thailand as part of the global capitalist system has important implications, not just academically, but also practically. Many people in Thailand tend to focus on domestic factors such as the Thai state and agri-businesses when they discuss how to reform the agri-food system in Thailand, or have not gone far enough to critically reflect on ways to challenge the global capitalist agri-food (and economic) system. Hence, this study can help them to reflect on how to improve their counter-hegemonic ideas and strategies. Moreover, the thesis' discussion of the exploitation of nature and labour under the capitalist system suggests a foundation that counter-hegemonic agri-food movements can build on, in order to link up with other social movements and expand their networks.

By bridging a gap between materialist analysis in the Marxist tradition and more subjectivist analytical perspectives, this thesis highlights the importance of the interconnections of ideas and practices, whether hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, which operate at interconnected local-to-global scales. Through the Thai case study, the thesis argues that transformative change in society should be seen as an un-linear process over a long period of time, and that counter-hegemony should take place at both ideational and material levels. Conceptualising counter-hegemony in this manner challenges the Marxist pre-occupation with "crisis and change". Moreover, through the Gramscian concept of "national-popular strategies" and Stephen Gill's "post-modern Prince" idea about political agency, the thesis takes into account heterogeneity within and between social movements in different social contexts, and does not simply dismiss the SAM and the LRM, which were partially inspired by Thai localism, as fundamentally insular and conservative. Instead, the thesis suggests that these movements bear seeds of counter-hegemonic transformation, even though they do not necessarily resemble stereotypical images of politicised, structured, and leftist national movements.

This thesis has also explored the relationships between the SAM, the LRM and the wider state-society complex in which they are enmeshed, particularly cross-class alliances that further or frustrate counter-hegemonic movements. Such empirical exploration supports the thesis' argument that predominantly counter-hegemonic movements may at times retain some hegemonic elements, and that the lines between hegemony, counter-hegemony, and co-optation of oppositions are often blurred. Hence, counter-hegemonic movements should constantly re-invent themselves in order to remain counter-hegemonic. By providing new perspectives on Thai localism and polarised politics in Thailand, this thesis points to the importance

of analysing social movements in relation to established political authority, and also reminds one to be mindful that academic and public discourses can have political-economic implications. Whether intentionally or not, discourses can help to challenge or justify the hegemonic status quo. For example, to suggest that the polarised political conflict in Thailand is rooted in class struggles, where the red shirts unproblematically represent the oppressed, help to legitimise some elites while helping to divide and weaken people's movements.

### **Part 3: Reflections on research design and process**

This part of the chapter reflects on the theoretical framework, methodology, and research process of the thesis. Although the thesis suggests that the combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework is appropriate for the study of the agri-food system in Thailand, there are four main points on which it can be improved. First, although the neo-Marxist framework helps the thesis to conceptualise and explore capital accumulation through the mainstream agri-food system, the concept of "accumulation by dispossession" is rather broad and encompasses a variety of processes ranging from land grabs to financial speculations. In particular the process of accumulation by dispossession through finance capital deserves further theorisation. Second, although the Gramscian concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony are useful as broad categories of forces that shape the agri-food system, they may give the impression that hegemony and counter-hegemony are exclusive polar opposites. However, as this thesis has argued, the lines between hegemony and counter-hegemony can be blurred in some instances, especially as predominantly hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces continue to change and adapt over time. Third, there are other theoretical

perspectives that might yield additional insights to the study of the agri-food system but are not addressed in this thesis due to the lack of writing space and time. Anarchist perspectives, for example, might shed new light on localist ideas and practices in Thailand, as well as on the conceptualisation of counter-hegemonic movements. Fourth, the thesis could do more to explore the consumption side of the agri-food system and heterogeneity (gender, class, age, ethnicity) within agri-food movements. Although there is a minimum wage in Thailand, further empirical study on the conditions of farm labourers is likely to yield additional insights regarding the exploitation of labour and nature through the mainstream agri-food system. Nevertheless, there was not enough time nor space to explore these issues in detail in this thesis.

As this thesis adopts an international political economy approach, it focuses on the study of the agri-food system in Thailand at the macro-level. This means that the thesis cannot explore all issues in full detail. The author tried to gather much relevant information from a variety of reliable sources, but there are few sources and studies on certain topics such as land grabs and the effects of financial speculations on agri-food producers in Thailand. Limitations of time and resources prevented the author from conducting extensive investigations into these topics. In addition, some issues were still unfolding at the time of writing, such as the paddy pledging scheme and the effects of the 2014 coup d'état, but the thesis could only take into account developments through 2014.

A five-month field research period in Thailand allowed for some flexibilities with interviews, and greatly helped the author to collect extensive primary and secondary source. The author's lack of prior relations with social movements in

Thailand meant that interview requests were sometimes denied. Nevertheless, the number and scope of interviewees were sufficient for this thesis, and interviews of 87 people have been used extensively throughout chapters 3 to 6. The use of semi-structured interviews also appropriately helped the author to gain important perspectives into the sustainable agriculture and land reform movements in Thailand.

#### **Part 4: Reflections on future areas of research**

The end of one research exercise always holds seeds for future projects, and so it is also with this thesis. Although this thesis has focused on the agri-food system in Thailand, it has sometimes come across issues related to other sectors of the economy. In addition, it will be interesting to see if the combined neo-Marxist and Gramscian theoretical framework adopted in this thesis can appropriately be used to explore the agri-food systems in other social and political contexts. The following paragraphs consider a few issues and questions raised by this research before outlining future research projects.

It has been noted that global land grabs are associated with the rise of "flex crops" and commodities with multiple uses across food, feed, fuel and other industrial sectors, which blur sectoral boundaries and sectoral governance instruments.<sup>1</sup> This suggests the importance of further analysing the agri-food system in relation to the governance of other natural resources, as well as other sectors of the economy. Moreover, chapter 5 discusses how many sustainable producer groups in Thailand try to develop add-value agri-food products to earn higher income and create more jobs. This raises many questions that should be investigated further,

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<sup>1</sup> Saturnino M. Borras, Jennifer C. Franco, and Chunyu Wang, "The Challenge of Global Governance of Land Grabbing: Changing International Agricultural Context and Competing Political Views and Strategies," *Globalizations* 10, no. 1 (2013), 162 and 165.



particularly regarding what kinds of agro-processing and industrial development can be compatible with sustainable agriculture principles and appropriate for small-scale rural producers.

Some technical problems facing sustainable agriculture groups in Thailand are also related to wider social and economic structures. For example, the sustainable agricultural movement can expand faster if governance structures which determine which research issues are prioritised or who gets funded become more favourable in promoting sustainable technologies. Another example is how high costs of organic products in urban centers, such as Bangkok, can partially be explained by high transport costs, which are related to the current logistical system and city planning. More research is needed, but it seems that such issues can also be traced back to the dependency on fossil fuels and the capitalist economy which encourages polarisation between urban and rural areas. In addition, as discussed in chapter 6, many members of the land reform movement occupied land because they had no jobs following the 1997 Asian economic crisis, or because working as labourers in other sectors of the economy was detrimental to their health. Some people in Thailand have also become interested in sustainable agriculture as a way to make a living because they have seen the negative environmental effects of some industrial activities, or because they feel alienated from office jobs.<sup>2</sup> These examples point to the interconnections of different sectors of the economy, indicating that many important issues in the agri-food system are inseparable from the capitalist system's cyclical boom and bust tendency, creations of reserve armies of labour, as well as capitalist tendency to exploit and alienate both nature and labour in a comprehensive manner.

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Long Pechsood, Bantad Mountain farmer from Trang Province, interviewed 1 October 2012 in front of Government House, Bangkok and Mrs. Supha Yaimuang, SATHAI, interviewed 3 October 2012.

Building on this doctoral work, the author hopes to pursue several lines of further research. One future research project could be a comparative study of hegemony and counter-hegemony in the agri-food system in Thailand with that of other countries in Asia, America, Africa or Europe. Such a comparative study can flesh out how specific local, national and regional conditions influence the mainstream agri-food systems and counter-hegemonic agri-food movements in these countries. This would provide new insights into the dynamics of the global agri-food system, as well as draw out interesting similarities and differences within and between agri-food social movements. As chapter 5 has discussed, the SAM in Thailand received some influence from agri-food movements in India and Japan, such as with regards to seed sovereignty ideas, natural farming principles, and effective micro-organisms technology. However, further study is needed to explore whether regional Asian perspectives on counter-hegemony in the agri-food system can be generalised. Aside from contributions to knowledge, it is also hoped that such comparative studies will help counter-hegemonic agri-food movements from different social and political contexts to learn from each other and to refine their counter-hegemonic ideas and practices. For example, the Thai sustainable agriculture movement can perhaps learn from counter-hegemonic forces in other countries which have more experience in connecting sustainable agricultural production groups with sustainable agro-processing and other industries.

To conclude, this research on the agri-food system in Thailand has yielded some useful insights which inspire the author to conduct further studies, such as a comparative study of the agri-food system in Thailand and that of other countries. In the longer run, the author also hopes to study the possibility that the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy can be geared towards more socially

and ecologically sustainable paths, or to positively and radically transform the capitalist economy as a whole.

## Appendix 1

### Sustainable Agriculture Groups in Thailand

This part of the thesis provides some factual information and contact detail of sustainable agriculture groups and institutions in Thailand which have been discussed in this thesis. The main focus is on producer rice mills and sustainable farmer groups in Yasothon and Surin provinces, as well as sustainable agriculture foundations in the Alternative Agriculture Network.

#### Producer Groups in Yasothon

##### *Naso Producer Group*

After the commercialisation of rice production in Thailand, locals in Naso community experienced rising costs of production while the prices of rice were determined solely by middlemen or rice mills.<sup>1</sup> Some Naso locals thought that their situation could improve if they could bypass the middlemen by building their own rice mill to process and sell their own rice.<sup>2</sup> The mill started to operate in August 1991, and by 2007 its organic rice is also being exported to Europe and other Asian markets.<sup>3</sup> Naso had also experimented with local currency and other local development initiatives.

Address: 57 Moo 2 Baan Sokkhumpoon, Tambol Naso, Ampur Kudchum, Yasothon province, 35140

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<sup>1</sup> Kanoksak Kaewthep, "Rakthammachart Rice Mill: Naso Community, Ampur Kudchum, Yasothon Province," in *Community Organised Welfare (2): Production Groups. Journal of Political Economy (for the community) 18* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 2001), 124-125. (in Thai)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-127.

<sup>3</sup> Bangkok Business Newspaper, "Naso, Yasothon: An Example of Self Sufficient Agriculture," *Bangkok Business Newspaper*, January 22, 2007. (in Thai)

### ***Bak-rua Producer Group***

Similar origin to that of Naso, the first Bak-rua producer-owned rice mill was established in 1989. In 1994 the group took a loan to develop a medium size rice mill<sup>4</sup> and started to mill both conventional and organic rice. With Naso producer group, Bak-rua tries to develop other rice products such as rice bran capsules.<sup>5</sup>

Address: 118 Moo 4, Baan Donphueng, Tambol Bakrua, Ampur Mahanachai, Yasothon province, 35130

### ***Nam-oom Sustainable Agriculture Social Enterprise***

Nam-oom enterprise was set up in 1999 and by 2012, it managed to collect and mill over 700 to 800 tons of rice annually which are exported or sold in domestic market.<sup>6</sup> The enterprise is managed by a 15 member committee from 12 villages, and it is aided by the Ministry of Commerce and Aden company, which help to export organic and fair trade rice to Europe.<sup>7</sup>

Address: 27 Moo 10, Baan Siripattana, Tambol Nam-oom, Ampur Korwang, Yasothon province, 35160

### ***Kammad Sustainable Agriculture Group***

Founding members of Kammad used to be part of the Naso group, but branched out in 2010. Unlike Naso, Kammad relies on a small-scale rice mill and decentralised

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<sup>4</sup> Suphachai Lorlohakarn, *Organic Farming Business* (Bangkok: National Innovation Agency and Asian Institute of Technology, 2007), 202. (in Thai)

<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Somwang Chomchuen, Manager of Bak-rua rice mill, interviewed 24 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>6</sup> Mr. Kamnueng Maneebool, advisor and former president of Nam-oom Sustainable Agriculture Social Enterprise, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>7</sup> Mr. Boonyuen Arj-arsa, a committee member of Nam-oom Sustainable Agriculture Social Enterprise, interviewed 23 December 2012, Yasothon,

management style. There are around 300 member whose land are under ALRO's jurisdiction. Many members also work to preserve and develop over 100 strands of traditional rice.<sup>8</sup>

Address: 61 Moo 3 Baan Noanyang, Tambol Kammad, Ampur Kudchum, Yasothon province, 35140 (co-ordinator: Mr. Boonsong Martkhao 169 Moo 17, Baan Noanyang, Tambol Kammad, Ampur Kudchum, Yasothon province, 35140)

### ***The Moral Rice (Thamma-ruamjai) Network***

In 2006, Thamma-ruamjai sustainable farmer members agreed to adopt moral codes of conduct which include, for example, giving up on liquor, smoking and gambling. Between 2006 and 2009, there were around 100 to 160 farmers who participated in the moral rice network.<sup>9</sup> The group has also established 16 learning centers in Yasothon and nearby provinces.<sup>10</sup> It focuses on domestic sales, such as through TV Burapha network.<sup>11</sup> For more information see: <<http://www.moralrice.net/>>.

Address: 80 Moo 8, Tambol Krajai, Ampur Pa-tiew, Yasothon province, 35150

### **Producer Groups in Surin**

#### ***Rice Fund Surin Organic Agriculture Co-operative***

In 1987, an organised network called "Farmer rice seller network" was formed to collect rice in large bulks to increase market power of farmers. It consisted of Sahatham for Development, Ta-toom Natural Agriculture, and Surin Natural

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<sup>8</sup> Mr. Boonsong Martkhao, Kammad group, interviewed 25 December 2012, Yasothon.

<sup>9</sup> Juthatip Patrawart, "Branding as the Marketing Strategy for Organic Products: A Case Study on Moral Rice," *Asian Journal of Food and Agro-Industry* no. Special Issue (2009), 256.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 256.

<sup>11</sup> Mr. Nikhom Pechpa, main co-ordinator of the Moral Rice Network, interviewed 23 December 2013, Yasothon.

Agriculture groups. The network struggled a lot as a business but after the Thailand Organic label was established in 1996, there was a re-newed attempt to develop organic agricultural production. In addition, new groups such as Taptai and Tanon joined the network. The network received funding in 2002 from the pilot programme to develop sustainable agriculture (discussed in chapter 5) to build a rice mill of 24 tons/day capacity, as well as a warehouse which can store 500 tons of rice. In 2003, it was registered as a co-operative (สหกรณ์เกษตรอินทรีย์กองทุนข้าวสุรินทร์จำกัด) with smaller producer groups named according to their areas such as Tamor and Ta-toom.<sup>12</sup> Since 2005, Surin rice mill was certified a Fairtrade producer group by FLO and started to market its own produce.<sup>13</sup> In 2012, around 250 out of the total of 326 farmer members received organic certifications.<sup>14</sup> For more information, see: <<http://www.ricefund.com/>>

Address: 88 Moo 7, Tambol Kae-yai, Ampur Muang, Surin province, 32000

### ***Tamor Group***

Natural farming group in Tambol Tamor started to organise in 1992. It consists of members from Baan Doan-leng North and South, Baan Yang and Baan Kockpech.<sup>15</sup> Around 10 members work on the preservation and development of traditional seeds and are all certified organic farmers.<sup>16</sup> In Tambol Tamor in 2012, there were over

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<sup>12</sup> Sajin Prachason et al., *Market Options of Farmers: Structural Effects on Unfairness and Benefit Distribution* (Bangkok: BioThai and the Social Research Foundation, Chulalongkorn University, 2012), 167-168. (in Thai)

<sup>13</sup> Manager interviewed 6 November 2012, quoted in Prachason et al. (2012), 168.

<sup>14</sup> Ms. Sompoi Jansang, manager at the Rice Fund Surin Organic Agriculture Co-operative Ltd., interviewed 19 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>15</sup> Chonlakanda Nakthim, *The Roles of Leaders in Knowledge Management of the Farmers' Organic Rice Farming: A Case Study of Natural Farming Group in Thamo Sub-District, Prasat District, Surin Province*. Thesis from the Department of Social Service, Thammasart University (Bangkok, 2008), 54. (in Thai)

<sup>16</sup> Prachason et al. (2012), 187 and 190.

3,000 farmers in the area, but there were only around 100 certified organic farmers and another 200 farmers who practiced diversified farming.<sup>17</sup>

Address: 99 Moo 9, Baan Doan-leng Nua, Tambol Tamor, Ampur Prasart, Surin province, 32140

### ***Ta-toom Group***

The group started to form since 1992. Initially, it focused on producing pesticide free rice then moved on to produce certified organic rice. In 2012, it had around 200 members and 10 main leaders who preserved and developed traditional rice strands.<sup>18</sup>

Address: Baan Nongbua, Tambol Nongbua, Ampur Ta-toom, Surin province, 32130

### ***Tap-tai Group***

Tap-tai is a small village consisting of 87 households in Tambol Tamor, Surin province.<sup>19</sup> The group started by selling sustainable rice and vegetables in local green markets, but many members then diversified their production to include organic pork production, which is more suitable to members' relatively small plots of land. The group received production advices from a lecturer at Ratchamongkol Esaan University of Technology, Surin.<sup>20</sup>

Address: 24 Moo 10, Baan Tap-tai, Tambol Tamor, Ampur Prasart, Surin province 32140

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<sup>17</sup> Mr. Pakphum Inpan, Tamor group, interviewed 20 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>18</sup> Mr. Thamma Sangkalee, Ta-toom group, interviewed 22 December 2012, Surin.

<sup>19</sup> Sukran Rojanaphrai Wong, *A Mission in Self-Reliance: Report of the Study on Tap-tai Community Way of Life, Surin*, by Natpong Pattanapanchai and Arat Saeng-Ubol (Nonthaburi: Alternative Agriculture Network, 2008), 18. (in Thai)

<sup>20</sup> Rojanaphrai Wong (2008), 61.



## **Sustainable Agriculture NGOs in Thailand**

### ***BioThai Foundation***

BioThai Foundation (มูลนิธิชีววิถี) originated in 1995 by networks of activists, farmers, academics, civil servants and members in rural areas. They are interested in bio-resources, local wisdom, community rights, food security and food sovereignty, agriculture and sustainable development, as well as fair trade. BioThai started out as the Thai Network on Community Rights and Biodiversity, then transformed into the Biodiversity and Community Rights Action Thailand in 1999. It was registered as a foundation in 2006 and is based in Nonthaburi province.<sup>21</sup>

For more information, see: <<http://www.biothai.net>> or <<http://www.biothai.org>>.

### ***Sustainable Agriculture Foundation Thailand (SATHAI)***

Founded in 1998, SATHAI (มูลนิธิเกษตรกรรมยั่งยืน) promotes sustainable agriculture based on principles of self-reliance for households and communities under different cultural, ecological, and changing Thai-global contexts. With a headquarter in Nonthaburi province, some of its work include developing techniques of sustainable agriculture, strengthening local organisations, collaborating with other sectors in the society, as well as developing linkages between producer and consumer groups.<sup>22</sup>

For more information, see: <<http://www.sathai.org/>>.

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<sup>21</sup> BioThai Foundation, “About BioThai,” accessed July 17, 2014, <<http://www.biothai.net/about>>. (in Thai)

<sup>22</sup> SATHAI, “Sustainable Agriculture Foundation (Thailand),” accessed July 17, 2014, <<http://www.sathai.org/th/about-saft.html>>. (in Thai)

### ***Khao Kwan Foundation***

Khao Kwan (มูลนิธิข้าวขวัญ) is an NGO whose work involves developing agricultural technology which is appropriate to local contexts. The foundation develops a variety of rice seeds, researches on the effects of agricultural chemicals, and develops practical sustainable agricultural options with farmers. Although it was registered as a foundation in 1998, its sustainable agricultural promotion work started since 1984. Khao Kwan's headquarter is in Suphanburi province in the Central region of Thailand.<sup>23</sup> Khao Kwan also offers hand-on training courses for farmers and any interested individuals.<sup>24</sup>

For more information, see: <<http://www.khaokwan.org/>>.

### ***Institute for a Sustainable Agriculture Community (ISAC)***

ISAC (สถาบันชุมชนเกษตรกรรมยั่งยืน) in Chiang Mai, Thailand, works to promote sustainable agricultural production and markets, such as through training programmes of over a thousand farmer in 15 to 18 Ampur in the North.<sup>25</sup>

Contact information: 363 Moo 4, Chiang Mai Mae-Jo Road, Tambol Nongjom, Ampur Sansai, Chiang Mai province 50210. Also see: <<https://www.facebook.com/isacchiangmai>>.

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<sup>23</sup> “Khao Kwan Foundation,” accessed July 18, 2014, <<http://www.khaokwan.org/khaokwan.html>>. (in Thai)

<sup>24</sup> “Farmer School,” accessed July 18, 2014, <<http://www.khaokwan.org/farmerschool.html>>. (in Thai)

<sup>25</sup> Mr. Kiatsak Chatdee, Co-ordinator at ISAC, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

### ***Community of Agro-ecology Foundation (CAE)***

CAE (มูลนิธิชุมชนเกษตรนิเวศน์) was founded in 1983. It is a non-profit organisation based in Surin which aims to promote sustainable agriculture practices and the importance of sustainable agriculture to health. It helps to found a green local market in Surin province alongside other initiatives.<sup>26</sup>

For more information, see: <<http://www.caesurin.com>>.

### **Green Net Co-operative**

Green Net Co-operative was registered as a cooperative in 2001. It focuses on domestic marketing and exporting of organic and fair trade agri-food products, as well as the promotion of sustainable agricultural production. It exports organic jasmine rice to many European countries such as Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, and France.<sup>27</sup>

For more information, see: <<http://www.greennet.or.th/en/about/greennet>>.

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<sup>26</sup> “Community of Agro-Ecology Foundation,” accessed November 11, 2012, <<http://www.caesurin.com/main/index.php>>. (in Thai)

<sup>27</sup> Green Net Co-operative, “About Green Net Cooperative,” accessed July 18, 2014, <<http://www.greennet.or.th/about/greennet>>. (in Thai)

## Appendix 2

### Community Land Title Deed Groups in Thailand

This part of the thesis provides some information and contact detail of community land title deed (CLTD) groups in Thailand that the author visited during the fieldwork of this thesis.

For more information, see the land reform movement's website at <<http://www.landwatchthai.com/index.php/en/>> and also Local Action Thailand's website at <<http://www.landactionthai.org/>>.

#### **CLTD Projects in the North**

##### ***Baan Raidong/Mae-aow***

In 2011, Raidong/Mae-aow group received a certificate from the Office of the Prime Minister to support its existence as a CLTD project. However, the legal status of the certificate is not the same as a land title deed signed by the Department of Land. After land occupation in 2000, around 1 rai per member was allocated to approximately 282 members. The group keeps 10 rai of land as common land, which have been used to grow crops to earn income for the group's collective fund.<sup>1</sup>

Address: Baan Raidong/Mae-Aow, Moo 1, Lamphun-Lee road, Tambol Nakhon  
Jedi, Ampur Pasang, Lamphun Province, 51120

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews with Rangsan Sansongkwaee, Nop Mangkornmai and Oonjai Akaruan, 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

### ***Baan Pong***

Baan Pong group consists of around 79 households or 412 members<sup>2</sup> who started to occupy over 458 rai of land in 2002.<sup>3</sup> In Baan Pong's CLTD project, around 60 percent of land is used for agricultural production, 30 percent for housing, and 10 percent for common purposes (guesthouse, meeting place, collective farm, roads).<sup>4</sup> Each household receives around 2 rai of land for private usage.<sup>5</sup> An interesting feature of Baan Pong is the establishment of the community's "land bank" which serves as a community welfare fund, a source of loans for agricultural purposes, and as a fund for political mobilisation.<sup>6</sup>

Address: Baan Pong, Moo 2, Tambol Mae-faeg, Ampur Sansai, Chiang Mai Province, 50290

### ***Baan Pae-tai***

Pae-tai members occupied around 200 rai of land in 1997. By 2012, there were around 70 members (when they first started to occupy land, there were around 100 households) who were allocated around 1 rai of land each. Around 100 rai of land is treated as common land for Pae-tai CLTD members.<sup>7</sup>

Address: Baan Pae-tai, Moo 11, Tonphueng-Jomthong Road, Tambol Nonglong, Ampur Wieng non-long, Lamphun Province, 51120

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<sup>2</sup> Methee Singsootham, *Practical Action Research Report on Sustainable Land Reform and Management by the People* (Nonthaburi: Land Reform Network and Local Act, 2010), 36. (in Thai)

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Direk Kong-ngern, interviewed 31 October 2012, Chiang Mai.

<sup>4</sup> Land Reform Network and Local Act, *A Report on the Study "Land Management and Social Justice: A Case Study of the Land Reform Network", Part of the Project to Encourage Social Justice*, Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 2010), 236. (in Thai)

<sup>5</sup> Singsootham (2010), 39-40.

<sup>6</sup> Land Reform Network and Local Act (2010), 235.

<sup>7</sup> Mr. Sukaew Fungfoo, President of the Baan Pae-tai CLTD project, interviewed 30 October 2012, Lamphun.

## **CLTD Project in the Central region**

### ***Klongyong Co-operative***

Klongyong co-operative covers a total area of around 1,803 rai and consists of 180 households (969 people).<sup>8</sup> It is the only CLTD group which received a legal title deed in February 2011 during the Abhisit Vejjachewea administration, which is certified by the Department of Land. This is partly due to its unique status as a rent-to-buy co-operative established in 1980.<sup>9</sup>

Address: Klongyong co-operative, Moo 8, Tambol Klongyong, Ampur  
Puttamonton, Nakhonpatom Province 73170

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<sup>8</sup> Kom Chad Luek Newspaper, *'Mae-Aow Villagers Smile for the Second CLTDs from the Prime Minister,'* March 18, 2011, <<http://www.komchadluek.net/detail/20110318/91899>>, retrieved 24 April 2013. (in Thai)

<sup>9</sup> Klongyong community leaders, "A Summary of the Struggles of the Klongyong Community (a Document Prepared by the Locals for Visitors), obtained on 10 October 2012," 1-3. (in Thai)

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